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AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
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20 January 1992

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 202**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1991-92

House of Commons

Monday 20 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Education (Schools) Bill

1. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with local education authorities in Wales regarding the provisions affecting Wales in the Education (Schools) Bill.

6. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make a statement on the future of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): The provisions in the Education (Schools) Bill relating to the inspection of schools and information on their performance were trailed in the citizens charter and the charter for parents in Wales, copies of which were sent to all local authorities in Wales as well as to a wide range of bodies representative of education interests. My officials have met representatives of the local education authorities to discuss various aspects of the new proposals and there has also been correspondence with the Department.

An announcement on the future role and organisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales will be made shortly.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister accept that education in Wales owes much to the professionalism and the independence of the Welsh schools inspectorate, and that there is widespread hostility among both teachers and parents in Wales to the possible privatisation of that service? Most importantly, why is the latest report on schools inspectors in Wales gathering dust on the Minister's desk? The House has a right to know why he is suppressing that report.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Of course the inspectorate is highly respected in Wales, but the hon. Gentleman will know that it was never geared to carry out inspections with the frequency that we expect will result from the provisions of the Education (Schools) Bill and that we envisage in the parents charter. What Labour Members say makes it sound as though they do not want parents to know what the schools that their children are attending are like.

With regard to privatisation, the hon. Gentleman must realise that if inspections are to be carried out with the kind of frequency that we have in mind, there has to be a considerable change in the inspection procedure. The consultants' report is part of our wider consideration of the future role of the inspectorate. It is an internal review, and we do not intend to publish it.

Mr. Rowlands: That is a disgraceful statement. Was not the citizens charter supposed to be all about open Government? The Minister has now said that he will not even publish the report. Is that because the report does not substantiate the proposals in the Education (Schools) Bill, which is nothing more than English ideology that the Government are transmitting to Wales? Why is the Minister slavishly following the English example when the Secretary of State for Scotland is not doing so? His right hon. Friend is sustaining and expanding the Scottish inspectorate, so why is the Minister emaciating ours?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is talking a lot of nonsense. His concentration on the consultants' review is ridiculous. Labour Members should consider what is said in the parents charter about inspection of schools in Wales. It is as a result of that charter that we have to take steps to change the inspectorate.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: How often are schools in Wales inspected by HMI and what change in that frequency is my right hon. Friend seeking to achieve?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I cannot give my hon. Friend a precise answer to that question, but the inspection of a school in Wales is a fairly rare occurrence, taking schools as a whole. The 58 inspectors spend only 65 per cent. of their time inspecting and the other 35 per cent. advising. Again, I urge the House to consider the fact that we expect inspections of individual schools to take place on a four to five-yearly basis.

Labour Statistics

3. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the number of male and female unemployed in Wales for 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and to the present date.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. David Hunt): In December of each of the years set out in the hon. Gentleman's question, the figures are 97,800, 79,900, 64,100, 72,900 and 95,600 respectively for male unemployed. For female unemployed the figures were 38,600 in 1987, 31,600 in 1988, 21,700 in 1989, 21,000 in 1990 and 26,000 in December 1991.

Mr. Ray Powell: Will the Secretary of State, with the Prime Minister, accept responsibility for the deplorably high level of unemployment in Wales? They both go about the Principality boasting about their actions in terms of foreign investment in Wales. They should be reminded that the major investors coming into Ogwr borough, and Bridgend in particular, were Ford of Bridgend, which was brought in under Jim Callaghan's Labour Government, and the Japanese company, Sony, which was also brought in by a Labour Government. It was the Labour party and a Labour Government who created investment into Wales before the present Prime Minister was even elected to this honourable House. If anyone should be boasting, it is those of us in the Labour party. The sooner the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister come to the Principality, the better: let the voters there decide who should have the credit for what is happening in Wales and also what should be done to the Conservative party in view of the deplorable levels of unemployment to be found in Wales.

Mr. Hunt: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has given me the opportunity to report to the House the latest figures for inward investment. The calendar year just finished, 1991, brought new record levels of inward investment to Wales from overseas and the rest of the United Kingdom. I am delighted to report that those new levels consist of 183 projects recorded by Welsh Development International, promising about 17,000 jobs. These are the highest figures ever.

Mr. Livsey: Will the Secretary of State note that unemployment in my constituency of Brecon and Radnor has doubled in the past 12 months? Will he refute the Prime Minister's suggestion that inward investment has come into Wales as a result of lower personal taxation? Will he agree that inward investment is due to the activities of the Welsh Development Agency, some of the lowest wages in Britain and high levels of skills, and that it is the quality of the Welsh work force as much as anything else that has brought inward investment into Wales?

Mr. Hunt: I find this very interesting. I have been concentrating on a report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs on Inward Investment into Wales. I thought that the hon. Gentleman was a signatory to the report. I have read carefully the reasons given for the record levels of inward investment that has come into the United Kingdom, including Wales. The Select Committee reported that overseas companies saw the attractions of the United Kingdom—a number of factors are set out—as including, in particular, a favourable tax regime. Has the hon. Gentleman decided to change his mind?

Mr. Grist: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the best hopes for the future of south Wales is completion of the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, which opposition from so many Labour Members has put in jeopardy?

Mr. Hunt: Yes. I hope that the Opposition will get their act together on the Bill and recognise that it represents enormous investment in Wales and something that will put Cardiff and Wales generally on the world map in a very big way.

Mr. Barry Jones: The Minister's answers are evasive. They do not go to the heart of the questions. I remind the Secretary of State of the haemorrhaging that has taken place, resulting in a severe loss of jobs in Wales for which he bears a heavy responsibility. I refer to just a few examples. At Ferranti in Bangor, there have been 250 job losses, which would be equal to about 2,500 jobs in eastern Wales. Nearly 500 jobs have been lost in the steel industry at Shotton in less than a year. As for apprenticeships in British Aerospace in Clwyd, more than 100 people may not be offered jobs by that great company because of the Government's failed economic policies. We have also lost jobs in the cement industry and there are question marks over the Point of Ayr colliery. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that since the beginning of the recession unemployment in Wales has increased by more than 38,000, and that during that period he has brought forward not one new policy to help the economy? He should be ashamed.

Mr. Hunt: I am pleased to announce this afternoon that since the last Welsh Question Time, there have been 13 new industrial projects—supported by £6 million of regional selective assistance which had been announced —500 new jobs and the safeguarding of 300 others. I am pleased also to announce a total of more than £6·5 million industrial investment by a further four companies, either expanding, modernising or setting up operations in Wales. I believe that Wales continues to be less severely affected by the recession than the United Kingdom as a whole, but it cannot possibly shield itself from the recession both in the United Kingdom and in the rest of the world.

I have been following the hon. Gentleman carefully. He has been wandering about Wales, giving a spending pledge here and a spending pledge there. He has failed to recognise that the statutory minimum wage policy that he supports would lose Wales 70,000 jobs. He has also failed to recognise that the Welsh people will have to pick up the bill for his spending policies.

Children's Homes, Gwynedd

4. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received on the conduct of children's homes in Gwynedd.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): Representations have been received from a former employee of Gwynedd county council and from hon. Members.

Mr. Jones: The Minister will be aware that certain allegations have been made about incidents in homes in Gwynedd, and in other parts of Wales, during recent months. He will also be aware that Gwynedd has set up an inquiry into those incidents. Is he satisfied with the conduct of that inquiry? Will he ensure that, when the inquiry is completed, its findings will be published for the benefit of all concerned in Gwynedd?

Will the hon. Gentleman investigate the levels of remuneration paid to those who work in children's homes? Should they not be paid salaries which accord with the status of the jobs that they perform?

Mr. Bennett: An inquiry has indeed been set up by Gwynedd county council, but I understand that it is currently suspended because of police investigations. Obviously, I cannot comment on the inquiry because of those investigations. I hope that Gwynedd county council will listen carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said about publishing a report of the inquiry; I certainly expect it to publish one.

I have always made it clear that I take seriously any allegations of misbehaviour in any children's home in Wales. That is why I directed Gwent county council to carry out a statutory inquiry into the organisation of the Ty Mawr home. I understand that the report on that is to be published shortly. I have also instituted an inquiry into the running of all children's home in Wales, and I shall publish the report of that within the next few days.

Kuwait and Bahrain

5. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the Minister of State's recent visit to Kuwait and Bahrain.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I led a trade mission to Kuwait from 5 to 13 November, which gave Welsh companies the opportunity to develop trade links. Twelve companies took part, several of which obtained firm orders, while other business is in the pipeline. While in Kuwait, I represented the United Kingdom at the extinguishing of the last oilwell fire. I also visited Bahrain, where 26 Welsh firms were represented by the Welsh Office and 10 other Welsh firms had exhibition stands, along with a large British contingent exhibiting at the Rebuild Kuwait '91 trade fair.

Sir Anthony Meyer: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the evident, tremendous and burning success of his mission. Could he give us any information on what that mission might represent in terms of increased business, especially for small and medium-sized businesses in Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: All the companies either represented by the Welsh Office or exhibiting in the two Gulf states were small or medium sized. We secured orders worth £150,000 during the visit, and there are good prospects for further orders of about £800,000. I hope that additional trade will flow from the mission in the longer term.

Mr. Denzil Davies: The Minister used the word "extinguishing". Shall we not, before long, see the extinguishing—after 13 years—of the three Conservative Governments who have managed to create the current situation in Wales, where gross domestic product per capita is lower than in any other region? After those three Conservative Administrations, Wales—alas—is now the poorest region in Britain.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about Kuwait.

Mr. Davies: It is indeed, but it is also about trade between Kuwait and Wales.

In view of the developments that I have mentioned, why should the people of Wales vote for a fourth Conservative Government?

Sir Wyn Roberts: They will vote for a fourth Conservative Government, because since 1979 the record of the current Government and their predecessors in regard to Wales has been excellent. We have transformed the Welsh economy. We have increased the number of businesses in Wales, VAT registrations are up by 25 per cent., production industries are up by 60 per cent.—twice the United Kingdom average—and the number of self-employed people has increased by 60 per cent. as well.

The reason why we arrange trade missions such as the one that I led to Kuwait—six similar missions have been conducted—is our interest in stimulating orders for the new Welsh economy.

NHS Trusts

7. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate how many hospitals in Wales have applied for NHS trust status.

Mr. David Hunt: The Pembrokeshire national health service trust will become operational on 1 April 1992. Last month I announced that applications had been invited from 14 units for NHS trust status in April 1993.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State explain to me, and to my puzzled constituents, what is the point of Powys health authority's applying for trust status, given that the entity which now constitutes the health authority would also constitute the trust? Will he also tell us what the cost of a transfer to trust status would be? A Welsh Office official was unable to answer that question at a recent conference in Llandrindod Wells. Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman explain what the trust could do that the district health authority, under its present management, could not?

Mr. Hunt: There has been a positive move towards NHS trust status in Wales. It now seems likely that 65 per cent. of acute services could be trust-based by April 1993. Powys health unit has been invited to prepare an application for trust status in April 1993. Like the unit in Pembrokeshire, it has done that because it believes that it can satisfy the Secretary of State on four points: first, that such a move would show benefits for patients; secondly, that it would improve management capability; thirdly, that clinicians would be involved in management; and, fourthly, that the trust has a future of financial soundness. Only if it had been clearly demonstrated to me that trust status would involve a positive move in that direction would I allow such status to be assumed. There is, of course, no question of allowing any trust to leave the national health service.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: In view of the clear directive contained in the document "Caring for People" that the Government expect health providers to set up NHS nursing homes, will the Secretary of State give a commitment that there will be health providers in Wales, and that trusts will establish such homes?

Mr. Hunt: It is very much for the providers to determine the future picture. I believe that, in regard to care in the community, we in Wales are leading the way. Many other parts of the United Kingdom view our progress with some envy. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the local joint authorities—including the local authority, the health authority and the other key partners —are currently drawing up local plans for delivering services to the local community.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the national health service management reforms, with the forthcoming trust status and record amounts of money being spent on the health service in Wales, will enable the health service there to build upon its success of treating record numbers of patients?

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If one compares 1979 with today, 34 per cent. more in-patients are being treated in Wales, and the number of day cases is up 227 per cent. Record numbers of patients have been treated, with record funding. I pay tribute to all those who work in the national health service in Wales for having achieved these outstanding results.

General Needs Housing

8. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dwellings for general needs housing were completed in the Monmouth constituency by Monmouth borough council and by housing associations in 1981 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In 1981, 67 social housing units were completed. There are 108 under construction at the moment.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to the Minister, although he has not answered the question that I asked. I asked him how many houses had been completed in 1991, and I will tell him the answer. The local authority completed nil houses in 1991. Housing associations completed 33. The people of my constituency are appalled that Monmouth borough council has millions of pounds tied up from the sale of council houses and cannot use that money for housing. Will the Minister use his powers to enable local authorities to provide houses for homeless people, whether through local authorities or housing associations, jobs for redundant construction workers, and new business contracts for the building companies which are going bankrupt?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. Local authorities can use 25 per cent. of their right-to-buy receipts for capital purposes and 75 per cent. for redemption of debt on housing revenue account, and in Wales we have a special offer whereby local authorities which sell land for low-cost housing may use 100 per cent. of receipts for capital purposes. I am sorry that local authorities throughout Wales, whose total debt on housing revenue account amounts to £1·1 billion, redeemed only £14 million of that debt last year.

New Houses

9. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new initiatives he intends to introduce to increase the rate of new house building in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A wide range of measures has been introduced, including shared ownership, plots for sale, partnership schemes and flexi-ownership.

My recently announced initiative on bringing into use empty flats above shops will help to increase the total stock, as will the further reductions in mortgage rates announced last week and the suspension of stamp duty.

Mr. Flynn: What would the Minister say to a constituent of mine whose business has been wrecked by the Government-created recession, whose home is to be repossessed this week because the Government's rescue scheme is too late and inadequate, and whose family face bed-and-breakfast accommodation because the local council has no council houses to offer because the Government have cut council house building in Wales by 90 per cent? Who is to blame? Is my constituent right to feel embittered against the Government?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that we face a world recession. It is taking place in France, Germany and the United States. There has even been a reduction in Japan. We have the benefit of a Conservative Government who will put the battle against inflation at the head of their priorities for dealing with the recession. I am confident that we shall see the end of the recession in the next few months.

As for housing in Wales, which was the basis of the hon. Gentleman's question, in the last full financial year for which we have figures, 10,000 properties were built in Wales. That means that since this Government came to power, up to the end of March 1990, a total of 117,000 new homes were built. We have added to the housing stock in Wales by more than 10 per cent. since 1979. Housing for Wales, which is charged with dealing with social housing, is on target this year to build 3,500 houses and to invest £170 million in new social housing.

Mr. Hain: The Minister's reply is arrogant and insulting. It takes no account of the massive rise in homelessness, of the mortgage repossessions in all our constituencies and of record waiting lists. Welsh local authorities have almost half a billion pounds in capital receipts. Why will not the Minister release that money, which could be used immediately to start building 100,000 new homes in Wales? He should take responsibility for doing so or accept responsibility for his party's vote at the next election, when Labour will be returned.

Mr. Bennett: As I said in answer to the previous question, local authorities can use 100 per cent. of their receipts if they sell land for low-cost home ownership. The hon. Gentleman's authority—Neath—has a debt of £25 million on its housing revenue account, yet last year it did not redeem a penny of it. Only a few months ago, Neath borough council complained that it did not have enough money for housing. In 1990 and 1991, it did not apply for any money from the top slice programme—for enveloping,

for group repair and area renewal, for the homelessness reserve, for the reserve for private or defective dwellings or for priority estates. The hon. Gentleman should ask Neath borough council why, when money has been available, it has not applied for anything in the past two years.

Mr. Flynn *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Member have a supplementary question?

Mr. Flynn: No. I wish to give notice that, because of the disgracefully inadequate——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to give the Minister notice of an Adjournment debate?

Mr. Flynn: That is precisely what I am trying to do, if I may. I wish to give notice that, because of the Minister's disgracefully complacent answers, I intend to raise the crisis of housing in Wales on the Adjournment.

Small Businesses

10. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he intends to take to support the mall business sector in Wales and to encourage its expansion.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We shall continue to place a high priority on supporting the small business sector by a wide range of programmes of assistance implemented through the Welsh Development Agency, the Development Board for Rural Wales, training and enterprise councils, local enterprise agencies and the Welsh Office.

Mr. Michael: May we have a pause in the ministerial litany of self-praise and complacency to recognise the reality of the interest rate burden, the impact of stop-go, the abandonment of research and development, the neglect of training and education and the fact that, because of Government policy, the nightmare of bankruptcy and failure is faced daily by those who run small and medium-sized businesses in Wales? With the threat of the election staring Ministers in the face, will the Secretary of State stop being complacent and persuade Cabinet colleagues to change their policies to ones that will create opportunity and stability for our business community in Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman seems to be excelling in gloom and doom today. My reply to him is the same as the one that I gave the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), in which I said that VAT registrations had increased by 25 per cent. since 1979. The hon. Gentleman referred to the problem of high interest rates. Yes, they are a problem, but we have had to impose them because of inflation. As inflation is low, the prospects for the future are good, especially if the Government are returned to office. We are the tax-cutting party; Labour is the tax-increasing party. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was absolutely right to describe it as a "spend, spend, spend" and "tax, tax, tax" party.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, in particular, the tourist industry and many other small businesses in my constituency, which are dependent on flexible working hours, part-time arrangements and appropriate salaries to match, would be devastated by the Labour party's minimum wage policy?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The tourist industry employs 90,000 people in Wales on the basis that my hon. Friend described. I can think of nothing more destructive than the Labour party's proposals.

Labour Statistics

11. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many men and women, full and part-time, were in employment in Wales and Mid-Glamorgan in *(a)* June 1979, *(b)* June 1987 and *(c)* the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. David Hunt: The figures on the basis requested by the hon. Gentleman are not available for Mid-Glamorgan or for part-time male employees, but for Wales, taking September 1991 as the date for which the latest figures are available, there were respectively 618,000, 498,000 and 501,000 male employees in employment. For the same dates, there were 250,000, 225,000 and 246,000 female employees in full-time employment and 165,000, 184,000 and 213,000 in part-time employment.

Mr. Griffiths: Does not the Secretary of State feel any remorse about those figures? They show that male employment has gone down massively, that there are some additional jobs for female workers—full and part-time—but that the overall picture is one of deficit, despite the record investment based on the quality of the Welsh work force. Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to say whether he thinks that before the next election these figures will improve, or will they get even worse?

Mr. Hunt: I regret that the seasonally adjusted figure went up by 700 to 121,600 last month, but I remind the hon. Gentleman that in January 1986, the figure was over 170,000. Since 1986 there has been a remarkable reduction, especially in the figure for the long-term unemployed. In January 1986, that figure was 74,014. It has now fallen 60 per cent. to 31,207, but, of course, there is still work to be done. However, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that earlier today I announced record inward investment figures for Wales, and we have every right to be proud of those figures.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Secretary of State notice that 12 months ago every vacant job in Wales was chased by nine unemployed people but that by last month 13 unemployed people were chasing each vacancy? Over the same period, small countries such as the Netherlands and Portugal and, indeed, larger countries such as West Germany and Japan, had a reduction in unemployment, so it is not merely a worldwide factor. Will he accept responsibility for the reduction in job opportunities in Wales and for the increase in unemployment? What is he going to do about it?

Mr. Hunt: I was pleased about the lower rate of increase last month and I very much hope that that will be the trend. Of course, there are problems, but we are far better able to negotiate those problems than we were. I believe that Wales is much better placed to ride out the worldwide recession than it has been and I can give the hon. Gentleman this pledge: I and my ministerial colleagues will continue to do everything that we can to attract investment to Wales. We have had remarkably good figures over the past year and we are determined to beat them in 1992.

Mr. Barry Jones: Has the right hon. Gentleman overlooked the job losses at Port Talbot steelworks—a great steelworks under immense pressure because of the recession engendered by his Government—and the continuing loss of jobs in the south Wales coalfields? Should not the right hon. Gentleman now apologise for the false promises that he made in 1991? Does he accept that his comment that the Welsh economy was extremely healthy smacks of the complacency of the do-nothing Government of which he is a member? His Government's record on the Welsh economy will lead to the loss of the seats of his two ministerial colleagues.

Mr. Hunt: The hon. Gentleman's cracked record does not seem to recognise that we are now in the age of disks. I am afraid that the Labour party is still in the 1960s and 1970s. I very much hope that we shall never see a return to those bad old days.

In 1979, the steel industry in Wales employed 42,000 people. Today, 18,000 people are employed producing 10 per cent. more steel. Those figures show the transformation in the Welsh economy and we are determined to see that continue. The last thing that we want is a return to the spend, spend, spend—tax, tax, tax policies of the Labour party.

Welsh Language

12. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of secondary school children in Wales are educated through the medium of Welsh.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The latest figures for 1990-91 show that about 15 per cent. of secondary school pupils in Wales are being educated in Welsh-speaking schools.

Mr. Butler: Did my right hon. Friend see the survey in *The Sunday Times* which showed that some Welsh-medium schools offer excellent education—some of the best education in the whole of the United Kingdom? Is not that a tribute to the quality of education within them?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I agree with my hon. Friend and with the comments in the article to which he referred. The Welsh-medium schools provide a first class education and I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that Welsh is being taught in eight out of 10 primary schools in Wales and in nine out of 10 secondary schools.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Racial Hatred

24. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions for inciting racial hatred there have been in each of the past two years; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): In 1990, there was one prosecution for an offence under part III of the Public Order Act 1986 and in 1991, there were four such prosecutions. In 1991, proceedings were commenced in a further case, but they have not yet been concluded.

Mr. Marshall: May I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. Although regretting the need for such prosecutions, may I congratulate him on the vigour with which he prosecutes those who peddle such odious doctrines?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. "Odious" is the word for the publications that infringe the Act. I wish that it were possible to bring more of those who are responsible for them to justice, but, as my hon. Friend knows, because he makes a close study of such matters, it is often impossible for the police to identify those who are responsible.

Mr. Janner: May I first associate myself with the words of the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) with whom I fully agree? That the Government are now taking action is appreciated. Will the Attorney-General please assure the House that such action will also be taken against people who do not normally reside here, such as Louis Farrakhan—if by mistake he or anyone like him is allowed in—if they come to this country to try to stir up racial hatred in this decent land?

The Attorney-General: The hon. and learned Gentleman is friendly in his remarks. He should know that it is not the Government who take action in these matters, but the Attorney-General. They are extremely important matters. The hon. and learned Gentleman will know that I recently had the privilege of giving the Sir George Bean memorial lecture in which I set out in some detail to the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women the basis for my approach to such matters. It may be helpful to me to put a copy of that lecture in the Library.

Sunday Trading

25. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Attorney-General how many representations he has received since the beginning of December which have been critical of his reaction to Sunday opening of stores.

The Attorney-General: Including letters addressed to other Ministers and transferred to me, the answer is about 2,000. Substantive replies have been sent in almost every case.

Mr. Hughes: Does the Attorney-General accept that the many letters protesting at his view about Sunday trading, as expressed in the House, suggest that the matter should be reconsidered by the Government, especially as the approach appears to be inconsistent and hypocritical? On Sunday trading, the Government say that there is a risk that the European Court might rule against us, so they take no action. On the environmental impact assessment directive, the European Commission sent a letter before action had been taken, accompanied by a personal letter. The Government said then that although they have been told that they are in the wrong, they will do nothing about it. Surely European laws should be either obeyed or disobeyed. It should not be a matter of pick and choose, as the Government please.

The Attorney-General: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not listen to my last answer. If he had, he would have heard me say that it was for the Attorney-General to enforce the law, not the Government. The answer on this subject that I gave in November made it perfectly clear that the decision is mine and nobody else's. I think that those letters show a wholly

understandable sense of frustration, but the House of Lords, before which an appeal is pending, has shown uncertainty about whether the provisions of the Shops Act 1950 remain part of our domestic law. Accordingly, the House of Lords referred the issues to the European Court of Justice so that the House of Lords could answer that question. I keep the matter under review, as I must, but in the circumstances I am not persuaded that the public interest requires me to take the necessarily large number of actions up and down the country.

Mr. Tony Banks: Action was taken on the poll tax.

The Attorney-General: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will contrive to listen to what I am saying on this complicated matter. My jurisdiction is limited to taking action in the public interest. Local authorities have a separate and specific jurisdiction conferred on them by the Act, and the course that they take is a matter for their judgment. The environmental assessment aspect is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, the relevant Minister.

Mr. Channon: Can my right hon. and learned Friend give us any estimate of the time that will elapse before the European Court gives its judgment on the matter? Can my right hon. and learned Friend take any action to shorten that period and clear up what is a highly unsatisfactory situation, whatever view one takes on Sunday opening?

The Attorney-General: I agree that it is unsatisfactory. The Government have asked the European Court at Luxembourg to expedite its hearing. The best that I can say is that we shall receive the answer to the question that the House of Lords has asked in forthcoming months—I hope that the number involved will be few, not great.

Mr. Anderson: What is the Attorney-General's authority for saying that he cannot rely on Crown privilege in relation to cross undertakings for damages? Is not it crystal clear that the Government are willingly in collusion with those stores that are using salami tactics bit by bit —before Christmas, between Christmas and the new year and after the new year—and which so handsomely contribute to Conservative party funds? Surely, circumstances have now changed and any reasonable Attorney-General would respond accordingly.

The Attorney-General: I have not troubled to inquire whether any firm has contributed to the Conservative party—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It is a matter of total indifference to me, as it should be to the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). If he chooses to use the word "collusion", and apply it to me in that context, he is attributing dishonourable conduct—he should be ashamed of doing so.

Sir John Farr: Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider advising local authorities—which still seem to be unaware of their present powers on which they can act—and circulating information to them to tell them that if they want to come down on Sunday traders, the statute book in Britain already gives them that authority?

The Attorney-General: I understand my hon. Friend's point, but the section is entirely clear and I think that all local authorities are aware of its provisions, which place the primary duty of enforcing the Shops Act 1950 on them. There is no shortage of advice available to local authorities to enable them to decide whether, in uncertain circumstances, it is politic for them to seek to start proceedings, whether criminal or civil. That is for local authorities to decide, and it is not for me to offer them advice.

Mr. Fraser: Does the Attorney-General agree that the defence of using the treaty of Rome in relation to breaches of the Shops Act 1950 is pretty flimsy and slender? As the European Court delays are providing a valuable premium for some people and holding up injunctive relief in this country, should not further representations be made to the European Court to deal with the problem as an injunctive matter so that certainty is quickly returned to the courts of this country?

The Attorney-General: We certainly want to know the answer and the House of Lords, which is dealing with an appeal in the B and Q case, also wants to know the answer. The hon. Gentleman is a distinguished and experienced solicitor. I do not know whether he wishes to reconsider what on earth he means by saying that it is a flimsy excuse: either it is part of the law, or it is not. So long as there is uncertainty about the matter, that must have a bearing on whether enforcement proceedings are taken by the Attorney-General up and down the country in a necessarily very large number of cases. I explained to the House in November that I do not consider that the public interest lies in my taking that very large number of proceedings up and down the country in those circumstances. Whether local authorities take the same view in their own jurisdictions is a matter entirely for them.

"Spycatcher"

26. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Attorney-General what progress he has made in identifying the total cost of the "Spycatcher" litigation.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): The total cost to the Government to date, excluding the contempt proceedings and officials' time, is calculated at £2,221,503.

Mr. Banks: As the Solicitor-General said, that excludes officials' time, so the figure must be that much higher. Is it not outrageous that so much British taxpayers' money should have been spent trying to suppress a book which in part told us about the treacherous activities of the security services in trying to undermine the democratically elected Government of Harold Wilson? Will the Solicitor-General assure the House that similar treacherous activities will not take place when the next Labour Government are democratically elected under my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock)?

The Solicitor-General: Whatever one thinks about the activities of the author, he was a former member of the security services. These cases have the very valuable result of getting a clear decision from the House of Lords, upheld in this respect by the European Court of Human Rights which took nothing from that decision, that such former members owe a lifelong duty of confidentiality.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Iraq

33. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what additional resources will be made available to improve health care for vulnerable groups in Iraq.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I have recently approved an additional allocation of over £1 million in aid for vulnerable groups in both the north and south of Iraq. Last week, I approved a further £345,000 for the British Red Cross. On 8 January I called for a high-level meeting of donor countries to respond to the United Nations latest humanitarian appeal. That has been favourably received.

Mr. Cohen: Has the Minister seen the statement made at the weekend by the Red Cross stating that without aid, the whole of Iraq faces massive starvation? Has she seen the Quakers report which states that tens of thousands of children are in jeopardy and thousands will die because of the lack of essential medicines? Is it not now time to lift the economic sanctions that are killing people, including children, in Iraq and to inject a huge amount of those essential medicines which are in short supply there?

Mrs. Chalker: First, I pay tribute to the British Red Cross and the many non-governmental organisations which have provided help in Iraq supported by money from the Government. We shall continue to support them, as my main answer to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) made clear. However, with regard to the hon. Gentleman's request that we should lift sanctions, I am afraid that he is way out of line. The needs of the Iraqi people can be met by the release of $1·6 billion of oil which would finance the purchase of essential humanitarian supplies to relieve that suffering. We continue to help in the meantime, and at a diplomatic level, we are working extremely hard to have Security Council resolutions 706 and 712 implemented. When that is achieved, the problems referred to by the Red Cross and the Quakers report will be substantially minimised.

Miss Emma Nicholson: In paying tribute to those excellent voluntary organisations whom the Government have grant-aided to help vulnerable groups in Iraq, does not my right hon. Friend the Minister agree that Saddam Hussein has ensured the continuing torment and lack of help for his people, particularly for the southern Shias in the marshes?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is right. Saddam Hussein continues to ignore the needs of the Iraqi people, particularly those in the south who have had less publicity than the Kurds in the north. Both need our help, but the help that they should be given is by their own Government, by the full implementation of resolutions 706 and 712. We are doing our best to make progress in the talks so that the Iraqi people will get the benefit of the export of Iraqi oil in the near future.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not clear to the Minister that we should be concerned, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has stated, about the plight of the people of Iraq and the starvation that is being caused? Is it not the case that as long as Saddam Hussein rules that country—as long as that brutal and murderous despot continues in power—there will be absolutely no solution for people in that unhappy state?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman knows that I believe that the Iraqi people will be safeguarded for the long term and enable the international community to give long-term development aid to that country only when Saddam Hussein is no longer at the helm in Baghdad. It is a very serious situation. The humanitarian groups have done extremely well. Bearing in mind the £45 million which this country has given since April, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we will continue to play our part. However, their only true relief, as everybody in the House and in the country knows, is for Saddam Hussein to be replaced.

World Population Conference

34. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister for Overseas Development will attend the conference from 31 January to 1 February 1992 for European parliamentarians on action on world population, sponsored by the British parliamentary group on population and development.

Mrs. Chalker: I much regret that I will be unable to attend that conference because of my forthcoming visit to southern Africa. My noble friend the Earl of Caithness has agreed to attend in my place. My officials will play a major role in support to European action on world population. I look forward to the conclusions of the conference with considerable interest.

Mr. Steen: The House is sorry that the Minister cannot attend the conference. All European Members would have liked to pay tribute to the splendid work that she and the Government have done for overseas development. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the ever-growing problem of street children is a consequence of overpopulation? Does she consider that some new initiative is needed to stem police brutality in countries such as Brazil—where there are 10 million street children—Guatemala, Mexico and other countries? Would my right hon. Friend feel able to lead a crusade with other European countries to put pressure on the Governments of central and south America so that every child there has a home, food, clothing and education and is not allowed to fall prey to the worst excesses of human nature?

Mrs. Chalker: I agree that the situation for street children not only in Brazil and Guatemala but in certain other countries is extremely serious. That is one good reason why we have been supporting several non-governmental projects in the region and why we have made representations to presidents and other leaders about the state of children in those countries. It is difficult to provide advice on population planning in some Catholic countries, but I am pleased at the progress that we are beginning to make. The more children who are born by choice and not by chance, the better, as we said in August of last year when working our our programme.

Sir David Steel: Although it is understandable that the Minister cannot be in two places at once, will she assure the House that her noble Friend will make a strong contribution to the conference? Does she agree that some

of our overseas development programmes have been vitiated by the rise in population in some of the countries concerned?

Mrs. Chalker: I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that my noble Friend will make a very strong statement of Government policy, even though I wish that I could do it myself. Of course the increasing population in some countries is harming the progress that they could otherwise make on development issues. However, it is good to note that because the contraception prevalence rate has increased considerably since 1985 in countries such as Bangladesh and a number of African countries, we are beginning to make more progress. By spending more resources on this matter, as I intend to do, having tripled our programme in the past 10 years, I believe that we shall make still further progress, with the help of education, too.

Sir Charles Morrison: Although I fully understand why my right hon. Friend cannot attend the conference of Parliamentarians, will she tell the House now whether the Government support the recent call by Mr. Robert McNamara for a global commission on population in preparation for the 1994 United Nations conference on population? Secondly, are the Government currently involved in giving advice or assistance to the Russian republics and to other east European republics?

Mrs. Chalker: In answer to my hon. Friend's first question, we believe that the UN conference on population in 1994 will be an important focal point and that all possible work to support it should be carried out. We have not yet concluded whether that work should be in the form suggested by Mr. Robert McNamara or be carried out in other ways. Nevertheless, we shall support such work.

In answer to the second part of my hon. Friend's question about population planning assistance to the former Soviet Union, although we have not been asked for such help, last week I agreed that £2 million-worth of medical aid should be spent in the republics of the former Soviet Union. That aid is already going out, starting with a specific gift that was made today in Moscow.

Mrs. Clwyd: In so far as the population of Africa, and especially that of Somalia, is clearly at risk from internal conflict and where the aid agencies cannot deliver any assistance because of that conflict, is it not time for the British Government to urge the United Nations to take a more interventionist and far stronger role in resolving those disputes?

Mrs. Chalker: Having visited homes for abandoned children in Somalia a couple of years ago, I can well understand concern not only about young children in that country, but about all its people. That was why, when meeting the United Nations new Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Ghali, last Monday, I took the opportunity to suggest to him the need for more action in Somalia. James Jonah's visit on behalf of the secretary-general looks like producing some suggestions, but we shall continue to fund British non-governmental organisations that are providing relief in Somalia in the form of both food and medicines. We hope that there will be peace soon so that we can do still more effective work.

Northern Ireland (Security)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): I have to report to the House with deep sadness that, shortly after 5 o'clock on Friday afternoon, seven construction workers on their way home from work were killed and seven were injured, five very seriously, when their minibus was blown apart in a massive explosion at Teebane Cross, on the main Omagh to Cookstown road in County Tyrone. The police investigation is continuing, but it is believed that two plastic barrels containing some 300 lb of home-made explosive were placed beside the roadside hedge and detonated by command wire from a vantage point overlooking the scene. The Provisional IRA has admitted that it carried out this mass murder. In addition, in the first three weeks of the year, five other people—all civilians—have been murdered by terrorists.

I know that the House will join me in extending deepest sympathy to the families, friends and colleagues of all those killed or injured, and in utter condemnation of these attacks, which demonstrate the profound depravity and moral bankruptcy of terrorism. All those killed or injured were working men going peacefully about their lawful occasions, yet the terrorists did not hesitate to murder or maim them.

In the face of such unmitigated evil, the reaction of the community and the Government is one of grief and of righteous anger; but I and my colleagues are absolutely determined that it must also be one of resolute and vigorous action. No society which believes in democratic values can allow the ballot box to be overridden by the bomb and the bullet. Violence has not brought, and will not bring, the terrorists any advantage. The democratic path is the one that we shall tread, and we shall go where it leads, not where terrorists seek to direct.

The first task for Government is to ensure that the security forces have the resources—legal and material—which they need. It is for the security force commanders to ensure that all the resources available to them are used with the maximum effectiveness. Both the level of available resources and their deployment are constantly adjusted as necessary to counter the foreseeable threat. When we judge that additional resources are needed, they are made available. My hon. Friend the Minister of State announced on Saturday that extra troops would soon arrive. They are already on patrol. In addition, extra troops are also now in the Province in support of a specific operation to enhance the security and to improve the effectiveness of vehicle checkpoints in Fermanagh.

We know that the terrorists can kill, but they cannot win. No democratic Government or society can allow such people to prevail. Nor will we. The security forces will continue to prevent or deter, as they are now doing, by far the largest part of planned terrorist activity. They will also do everything practically possible to protect the public. With the assistance that is increasingly forthcoming from ordinary members of both sides of the community, they will resolutely and successfully pursue not just those who carry out terrorist attacks but also those who plan them. They will do so within the law; and they will continue to bring the criminals before the courts. That is the only way for a civilised democratic Government to deal with terrorism.

I wish to add a personal word on a subject related to recent events, in which I played a personal role. The decision to maintain the acceptance of a long-standing invitation to go on Mr. Byrne's show in Dublin on Friday night was prompted by the opportunity that it afforded to speak to the people of the Republic of Ireland about terrorism and the response of a democratic society. Yielding to an unsignalled invitation to sing on the show was innocent in intent, for reasons which are personal to myself, but it was patently an error. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I wish to apologise unreservedly to the families involved in Friday's bombing, to those who represent them in this House, and to all those in our wider society who would have taken wholly justified offence.

My commitment to Northern Ireland and its people is, I think, familiar to the House. It is because of that commitment and my understanding of the values and decent opinions of the Province that I have placed my resignation at the Prime Minister's disposal. I also advised him that if he were not to accept it on the spot he should defer any decision on it until after he had concluded his coincidental visit to the Province today.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. On behalf of the Opposition, I join with him in extending sympathy to the families whose lives were shattered last Friday by the IRA's vicious murder campaign. This afternoon, the House must demonstrate its united determination to resist terrorism. We must give a clear and simple message to the IRA and other organisations which emulate its savagery. There are no legitimate targets, be they members of the security forces or civilians. We will not give way to those who mistakenly believe that power grows out of the barrel of a gun. They can play no part in any inclusive dialogue which can create a genuine peace process.

The IRA should have no illusions that it can bomb and shoot its way to the conference table, for it cannot. No one who seeks to impose his will by terror can have a constructive role to play in the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland. No one who is responsible for massacring his fellow citizens will be accepted as a partner in the effort to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

There is a legitimate expectation that the Government will provide the resources, in terms of both personnel and finance, to ensure the security of all the people of Northern Ireland. Can the Secretary of State therefore confirm, as he did in part today, that the Government will meet that expectation? In this time of sorrow, when many people are close to despair, we must remember the many occasions on which the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the security forces have thwarted the evil enterprises of the terrorists. In the words of Sir Hugh Annesley, it is slow, patient and incremental police work that will succeed in defeating this evil; there is no quick fix.

The people of Northern Ireland and, indeed, of Britain and the Republic expect their constitutional politicians to put aside their differences in pursuit of a peaceful political solution and to raise no false obstacles to sitting down to discuss matters among themselves. We heard at the end of the statement a characteristically honest and courageous statement by the Secretary of State. Those who have worked with him during the time that he has been in his present post have come to admire the hard work, courage and assiduity with which he has pursued the object of bringing the parties within the island of Ireland to sit down

with the British Government and resolve their differences. What happened on Friday night happened, but in my humble opinion it never was, nor should it be regarded as, a resignation matter.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, not only for his robust statement about democracy but also for his very kind personal words.

I confirm that the Government will meet the expectation in terms of personnel and finance. I agree that patient work by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, supported by the other security forces, is the key to these endeavours. In the searches in Belfast over the weekend of 11 and 12 January, which on three occasions revealed a mass of destructive material, we had an outstanding example of that patient work.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The House will be aware that Ulster Unionist Members bitterly regret the need for the Secretary of State's statement. It will be aware also that we have a long, deep and bitter disagreement with the Government over their whole political and security policy in Northern Ireland. However, we believe that it was right that the statement should be made in the House, from which have come the decisions that, in our opinion, have done so much to encourage the IRA through the years. I sometimes think that if the mutilated bodies of those who have been killed were laid out on the Floor of this Chamber the consequences of the decisions of those who sit here might be more effectively brought home to them.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a leading Northern Ireland member of his own party recently described security in the Province as a joke? For the past 23 years Unionists have been saying exactly the same thing with regard to both security policy and political policy. To the people of Northern Ireland the Prime Minister's "no change" comment is simply a promise of more of the same. If the Government are not prepared to tolerate a situation of continuing violence six years after the previous Prime Minister first uttered those words, let them forsake that which has failed.

Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that we very much welcome his commitment to taking the path of democracy regardless of where it leads? Indeed, that was the policy espoused by two Members of this House—Airey Neave and Ian Gow—who were murdered. If the Government were to decide to take that route, their decision would be very welcome in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for expressing his approval that a statement should be made today.

In reply to his observations about security, I should point out that in recent weeks the Chief Constable indicated that four out of five terrorist attempts are prevented and interdicted as a result of the work of the security forces. It is, of course, a matter for concern that there should be the fifth. The manner in which the security forces in Northern Ireland conduct themselves commands the admiration of all, and I am quite certain that the hon. Gentleman did not intend to impute any lack of commitment to them.

In reply to the hon. Gentleman's comment about the Government's policy since 1985, I should make the point that I have been Secretary of State for two and a half years of that period. There are moments when I think that it may be that insufficient attention is paid to the coincidence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement with the upsurge in the supply of Libyan arms, which made a very considerable difference to the armaments of the IRA.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I should like to express here, as I have done outside the House, my deepest sympathy to the bereaved and to the families of those who were injured. I assure the Secretary of State that the people in my constituency are no longer impressed by congratulations on their resistance to terrorism. They want positive, active measures to bring these devils to justice.

My people feel that the right hon. Gentleman would have been better employed if he had rushed to comfort the bereaved rather than carry out a song-and-dance act among people in Dublin, or even watch a rugby match. That is the opinion of the people I represent. However, the right hon. Gentleman has shown that he is indeed a right honourable gentleman, and for that he deserves great credit.

What steps were taken to protect the employees of this firm following an explosion that took place some time ago and that could have killed as many as were killed this time?

Mr. Brooke: I recognise the force of feeling that prompted the hon. Gentleman to speak in the way that he did on behalf of his constituents. There will be a thorough investigation, which will address all the circumstances, into this attack and that journey.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I express my sympathy, along with that of my two parliamentary colleagues who are at funerals in Northern Ireland, for the families of those who have been killed and send our sincere wishes to those who have been seriously injured for a speedy and full recovery.

I add my voice to the condemnation of the activity of the Provisional IRA which has pertained in Northern Ireland for more than 20 years and which in this case was clearly sectarian as it killed seven Protestant workers. Actions of evil and barbarism are its stock in trade.

May I ask whoever may hold the Secretary of State's office, whether the right hon. Gentleman or his successor, to recognise that the policy in security has failed? Its failure can be seen in the graveyards across Ulster. We need not a tinkering with security policy—a change here and a change there—but a root-and-branch change in security policy so that it changes from a reactive one to a proactive one and becomes a policy of going after the IRA, of taking the fight to the IRA. That will put us on the route to victory over terrorism.

Mr. Brooke: I join the hon. Gentleman in his moving remarks about graveyards across the Province and in his condemnation of sectarian attacks such as that which occurred on Friday last week. I understand the feeling within his party that has given rise to some of the security recommendations which he conferred on my hon. Friend the Minister of State last week, and which he described as a root-and-branch policy. However, I am not sure that everybody who looked at what can and should be done in the Province would necessarily agree with all the elements of the policy that he put forward.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I join the entire House in utterly and unequivocally condemning the atrocity that led to the Secretary of State's statement. Seven people, most of

[Mr. John Hume]

them young people and all from the Protestant community, were murdered, and murdered for exercising one of the most fundamental rights of all—the right to work. They were also exercising their right in keeping with the loyalty with which they were born, as they were helping to rebuild a security station. Presumably, those who murdered them were also born with loyalties. The answer to divided loyalties and different loyalties is not murder; it is respect—respect for the differences and an accommodation of those differences.

Achievieng that accommodation is the challenge that faces the House, the two Governments involved and all the parties in Northern Ireland. I ask both Governments to intensify their co-operation in order to achieve that aim. If certain parties refuse to co-operate, we should get on with it anyway, and leave no vacuum to be filled by murders such as those which happened on Friday.

As to the Secretary of State's personal statement, as he knows, we do not always agree about everything, but we very much appreciate the efforts that he is making to bring everybody around the table. If the process is to be continued, I hope that his Prime Minister will ensure that he is there to continue it.

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks, and not least his closing remarks. He has been a doughty fighter over a long period in favour of the use of democracy and dialogue and in condemnation of the use of violence. If this incident plays a part in intensifying the co-operation between the two Governments on security policy, I think that good will have come out of it. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, that all of us who are engaged in the democratic affairs of the Province—that does not simply involve Governments; it involves also political parties—have a joint responsibility to see whether we can advance matters by way of dialogue.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I know that it would be the wish of my constituents that I should convey heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved and the injured in their grief and agony. For more than 20 years the IRA has been executing a horrendous campaign of genocide against the Protestant community, and in the names of the thousands of dead and injured I urge the Government to take the war to the terrorists. That would need the full, undivided and unambiguous support of every decent person in Northern Ireland, and the support of the Dublin Government, who have equivocated too often in the past.

I repeat a suggestion that I made to the Secretary of State at the time of the last atrocity in Northern Ireland. I asked the right hon. Gentleman to appeal to the Roman Catholic Church to excommunicate the terrorists—the evil gang of murderers, and their supporters and helpers. I was interested to read in a Northern Ireland newspaper today that the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Tuam had considered the same proposal.

I wish to refer to the personal statement which the Secretary of State made. I think that his decision was an honourable one and one which we would expect from an honourable man. I pay tribute to the efforts that he has made since he has held the office of Secretary of State to bring all constitutional politicians together. There is still hope that talks can succeed. I point to the last Northern Ireland Assembly, of which I had the honour of being Speaker. The Members of that Assembly worked for the good of everyone in Northern Ireland, regardless of religion or politics.

Mr. Brooke: I appreciate the personal remarks made by the hon. Gentleman.

When he talks of taking the war to the terrorists, I must reassert from the Dispatch Box that the actions of Her Majesty's Government, and of the security forces on their behalf, will be conducted under the rule of law and that the rule of law will not be thrown away, for that would be a concession to the terrorists.

It is at times suggested that the security forces are operating under a series of shackles, which it is sometimes suggested are of a political nature. I know of no such shackles.

Mr. Alex Carlisle (Montgomery): May I and my right hon. and hon. Friends join in expressing sympathy for those who died or were injured in the atrocity in County Tyrone on Friday? It was murder of extreme wickedness. May I also say on behalf of my party that the personal code of conduct of the Secretary of State is an example to us all? I urge upon him that he should not resign. If certain others were in tune with his message of peace, we should see much quicker progress in Northern Ireland.

Will the right hon. Gentleman agree that he should hold his nerve to the twin track of political progress and strong security? Will he agree also that it would be a serious mistake to abandon the high standards of justice to which we try to keep as a reaction to these events and the evil in Northern Ireland that took place last Friday?

Does the right hon. Gentleman share with me the view that nobody should be allowed to bomb his way into any forthcoming general election campaign? Surely all political parties would do well to agree that there is to be no political vacuum in Northern Ireland and that we are determined to fight for peace as the future of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I appreciate the hon. and learned Gentleman's personal remarks. I confirm that the Government's nerve will hold in the context of the twin track of political progress and a robust security policy conducted under the rule of law.

In addition to what the hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned, the Government are preoccupied with social and economic development. Dire though the attacks on Belfast have been during the past two months, it is a sign of just how successful economic development has been that the IRA should have felt it necessary to retaliate in the way that it has.

On the question of the period between now and the general election, obviously I cannot predict the exact course that events will follow. I share the hon. and learned Gentleman's view that if we can avoid a vacuum, that will be in the interests of a democratic society.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): May I assure my right hon. Friend that, in my judgment, it is both correct and entirely characteristic that he should offer his resignation? Whatever the outcome of that gesture, I hope that he will be reinforced and fortified by the knowledge that the whole House recognises the formidable qualities that he has brought to one of the most taxing posts in Government.

May I say, as every other hon. Member would wish to say, that we condemn that act of violence—indeed, that act of war, for that is what it was—and have great sympathy with the victims? However, if justice and peace could be secured by this House passing ritual condemnations, Northern Ireland would be the most pacific province in Europe.

We are once again confronted with the fact that there can be no progress in Northern Ireland without greater military security. Although I appreciate that no one should at present, and on the Floor of the House, talk lightheartedly about the deployment of military forces in Northern Ireland, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the considerable virtue that many would feel if the border with the Irish Republic were more effectively supervised hereafter?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his generous personal remarks. Of course, I endorse what he says about justice and peace and about the need for greater military security. I hoped that I had made that clear in an earlier answer. The fact is that everything else that occurs in Northern Ireland must be sustained by the quality of the security policy.

I agree with my right hon. Friend about the significance of the border in the campaign in which we are engaged. There is no doubt that the scale of the weapons brought from Libya in the period before the Eksund was apprehended by French Customs has made a considerable difference during the past five or six years. It is known that that material is stored in the republic and then brought north for use by the terrorists. Of course, it is also used by those terrorists who choose to reside in the republic. Better maintenance of the border is a central factor in our policy and it is very much at the heart of the arrangements and agreement that we have with the Irish Government.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): The right hon. Gentleman should not consider resigning over the affair in Dublin. The strong views expressed on both sides of the House—which in itself is unusual, divided as it is in its political structure—on the way that the right hon. Gentleman has carried out his job should send a clear message to the IRA: that it will not bomb its way to the conference table; it will not affect us now; it will not affect us during the general election; and it will not affect us after the general election. Such unanimity is unusual in this House, so the IRA should note that message.

There is no quick fix for security in Northern Ireland —and I know that the right hon. Gentleman does not think that there is—whether in dealing with last Friday's incident or, sadly, the tit-for-tat murders that follow. There is no easy way and internment is not the answer. Will the right hon. Gentleman study the battery of legislation available in the Province to determine whether it could be used more effectively by the security forces to interrogate people? That is what people sometimes have in mind, but think that it should be done by internment. I believe that it can be done without internment.

Mr. Brooke: I pay tribute to the quality of the testimony given by the right hon. Gentleman—the only Back-Bencher who has held my office—about the way in which democracy is defended against the forces of darkness in Northern Ireland. I shall, of course, establish whether we can use elements of the legislative battery that is available to us in a different way from the way in which it has been used until now. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to make any suggestions privately, I shall be very grateful for them.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): I accept everything that has been said by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House about the need for a stronger line against terrorism. Does my right hon. Friend agree, however, that for 20 years he and his predecessors have pursued the will-of-the-wisp of power-sharing, devolved government; and that, for as long as it is pursued, the IRA will believe, rightly or wrongly, that it will get us out in the end?

Has not the time come at last—some of us have been saying this for a long time—for my right hon. Friend, or his successor, to consider seriously the alternative policy that many have advocated: administrative devolution, or short-term integration? Is that not the only way to make it clear to the IRA that there can be no question of the United Kingdom's abandoning the Province?

As for my right hon. Friend's personal position, may I express my admiration for the frank and manly way in which he has offered his resignation? Occupying, as he does, what is virtually a vice-regal position, only he can judge whether he can maintain his authority after the visit to Dublin. That is above all a matter for him to decide; but I very much admire the way in which he addressed the House with his habitual frankness.

Mr. Brooke: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for his kind closing remarks.

I am aware that what the Government have latterly pursued has been periodically categorised as power-sharing devolution. The Government's view has been that, if we are to have a system that will work and last in Northern Ireland, it must be a system on which agreement can be obtained around the table, and on which the endorsement and the thumbprints of all involved in constitutional politics in the Province can be secured. We have kept an open mind about what that system might be. In my opinion, the sooner that we return to serious discussion about the government of the Province, and about the other considerations that were invested in the earlier talks, the better the people of Northern Ireland will be served.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I appreciate that there is great interest in this serious matter, but we have another statement, and there is great pressure on the subsequent debate. I shall allow three more questions from each side, but I am afraid that after that we must move on.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I strongly disagree with the political intervention of the right hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery). What evidence is there, however, that, after nearly 22 years of sustained terrorist atrocities, the Provisional IRA is any nearer to achieving its objectives than when it started its activities in 1970?

If the country and the House have refused, since then, to give in to terror—despite all the horrors that have been inflicted against humanity on the mainland and, especially, in Northern Ireland—why should the leadership of the Provisional IRA and its fellow travellers, wherever they may be found, conclude that we shall give in to terror during the next 21 years?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman's attitude to terrorism always does him immense credit. I am grateful to him for what he has just said. I confirm that no progress of any sort has been made by the Provisional IRA towards its objective.

If I may hark back to the answer that I gave to the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), one of the areas on which there has been a significant concentration by the Government and the security forces in recent years is the financial resources available to terrorists—I hasten to say on both sides of the community. There is not only anecdotal evidence but a fair amount of proxy evidence now that that is working.

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): Does my right hon. Friend accept what is becoming obvious by now—that many of his hon. Friends, and Members in all parts of the House, have no wish or even thought that he should resign over this issue, or that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should see fit to accept his resignation? Does he recollect that during the talks last summer that he strove so hard to make successful the IRA, at least for a time, was marginalised? Does he further agree that the best security for the people of Northern Ireland is in talks and an agreement between political leaders and parties within Northern Ireland so that they may govern their own Province in the interests of all its people? Does my right hon. Friend think that, election or no election, the sooner they get on with it the better?

Mr. Brooke: It was, I think, common cause among all of us who were involved in the talks last year, and who, I hope, will be involved in the talks in the future, that they are not peace talks per se; they are talks about a political settlement, not only in terms of Northern Ireland but in terms of the relations between Northern Ireland and the republic and between Great Britain and the republic. However, my hon. Friend is perfectly correct: if we can make constructive progress along those lines, one of the consequences will be that we shall marginalise the terrorist.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I join with colleagues in all parts of the House in sending my deepest sympathy to the relatives of those who lost their lives in Friday's slaughter. May the House not forget, through the Secretary of State, the workmates of those relatives who I am sure today, as they go about their legal business and pursue their employment, must have their own personal thoughts against the background of Friday's events.

I believe that I am right in saying that the Secretary of State is a direct descendent of the famous Scottish writer J. M. Barrie. May I take the liberty of reminding the right hon. Gentleman of his relative's famous quote in relation to his own personal position: that each man's life is like a diary in which we set out to write one account and finish up writing something different and that our most humble moment comes when we compare what we have written with that which we intended to write.

In relation to the right hon. Gentleman's personal position, there is no hon. Member who believes that he intended any malice in what happened on the television show on Friday night. In the presence of the Patronage Secretary and the Leader of the House, may I suggest to the Secretary of State that his personal position, because of the very sensitive job that he does in Government, should be cleared up before this day is finished?

Mr. Brooke: In responding to the hon. Gentleman's reference to Sir James Barrie, I should say that I do not, I fear, have a drop of Scottish blood, but he was my father's godfather. The hon. Gentleman has introduced me to sayings of his in the House today that I had not previously appreciated.

As to what the hon. Gentleman said about those who worked for Karl Construction, the building firm that was decimated on Friday, let me pay here, on the Floor of the House, the most profound tribute to those in civilian employment in the Province who go to work to make it possible for the security forces to do their job.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is right that he should restate the Government's commitment to their policy in Northern Ireland, based on the rule of law? Does not he equally expect the rule of law to be observed on both sides of the Irish border? For a considerable time, at least some of us have questioned where the IRA is trained and where it comes from. I should be glad to hear, therefore, what intensification of efforts are being made by Garda Siochana or Irish military personnel.

As regards my right hon. Friend's personal position, he is usually right and he is inevitably honourable. Although the hard and stony-hearted would never be touched by his personality, anybody with a shade of warmth would respond vigorously. I sincerely hope that he retains his position.

Mr. Brooke: I am aware, as we all are, that activities of a potentially terrorist nature occur in the Republic of Ireland. I am immensely gratified that those who participate in the activities of co-operation between the RUC and Garda Siochana say that the quality of co-operation is at its highest point for 30 years. In practical terms, it can always get better, and that applies on both sides of the border. In our relations with the Irish Government and the Garda, we are determined to secure a further contribution to the ending of terrorism in Northern Ireland. Of course, the Irish Government give us considerable co-operation, but in all these affairs—this applies to us as well—we can be still more effective than we are.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I rarely comment on Irish affairs, not because of lack of interest but because the Irish communities would reject any opinion or suggestion if they considered it a "Brit" suggestion or opinion, but, in this instance, the circumstances are so hideously distressing that I feel compelled to comment and to ask the Minister whether he thinks it a heavy irony that last Friday's incident followed successive discoveries of large caches of arms and whether perhaps it was a desperate attempt by the IRA to reassert some degree of authority.

Some people complain about security, but perhaps we can all agree with the plea of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) for a proactive rather than a reactive response. Does not the proactivity need to be politicians of all parties coming together and discussing and listening to each other rather than simply making pronouncements?

The Secretary of State is one of the few Ministers for whom I have any respect. We have had enough casualties and it would be singularly unfortunate and quite improper

to offer the IRA the additional victory of his resignation. I hope, in common with the rest of the House, that the matter is resolved today.

Mr. Brooke: The Chief Constable of the RUC, both last July and, more recently, at the beginning of December, warned of the intensification of terrorist activity. It was recognised that Tyrone was likely to be the area in which there would be activity subsequent to the activities in Belfast. I cannot comment on whether last Friday's events were reactive to the security forces' recent successes, but the searches on 11 and 12 January were, by the standards of the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), proactive exercises in terms of their success.

I am not confident about how I should take the hon. Gentleman's concluding remarks, but I shall bear with equanimity what I suspect may be a poisoned chalice.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Is not it now incumbent on all decent men and women in both our countries to sink their party differences and concentrate on destroying this evil? To that end, will my right hon. Friend tell the Irish Government that their constitutional claim to Northern Ireland gives a spurious justification to the IRA's expressed determination to drive the British out of the island of Ireland? Will he also point out to the Labour party that its constant and continual opposition to the prevention of terrorism Act will deprive our security forces of the extra powers that they need to destroy terrorism?

Mr. Brooke: In terms of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, I said when I addressed the Dublin chamber of commerce on Friday in conjunction with Co-operation North that the Irish Government had made it clear that articles 2 and 3 would be on the table with regard to any talks, and that is, of itself, a reason to seek to proceed with the talks. As for the point my hon. Friend raises about the Opposition's attitude to legislation, it is up to the Opposition to speak for themselves—and I say that knowing that they will do so honourably.

European Fighter Aircraft

4.15 pm

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about the selection of the defensive aids sub-system, known as DASS, for the European fighter aircraft.

The House will be aware that the majority of contracts for the development of this aircraft have already been let, including the radar selection which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 8 May 1990. However, the selection of a DASS for the aircraft has remained outstanding. This system is a key element of the integrated suite of capabilities for the EFA. It will enhance the survivability and combat effectiveness of the aircraft in hostile electromagnetic environments by providing a self-protection capability, including warning of hostile missile attack and initiation of counter measures. Our Gulf experience showed this to be a crucial requirement.

The DASS is thus required to meet a most demanding specification at the forefront of combat avionics. Invitations to tender were issued to companies throughout the EFA partner nations. The EURODASS consortium led by Marconi Defence Systems Limited offered a solution, and this has been subject to rigorous scrutiny to confirm that it meets the necessary technical criteria. There have been equally difficult negotiations to satisfy the partner nations' demanding requirements.

I can now tell the House that, subject to the resolution of a number of detailed contractual points, we and our EFA partners, Italy and Spain, will endorse the selection of the EURODASS proposal. The fourth EFA partner, Germany, has not yet completed its selection process, but the option to join its partners in the EURODASS solution remains open. I am grateful to my ministerial colleagues in Italy and Spain and their officials for their constructive and helpful approach.

The Government remain strongly committed to the EFA development programme and to the provision of high quality equipment for the armed forces. An effective DASS is essential for the EFA's survivability.

The EURODASS proposal illustrates the vitality and competitiveness of the British aerospace industry. I am sure that the whole House will welcome this further evidence that the EFA programme continues to gather pace.

The EURODASS contract will be worth around £200 million with Marconi's share at just below £100 million. It is expected to lead to the creation of some 500 new jobs, mainly at Marconi's Stanmore and Plessey Avionics' West Leigh sites, but also at a large number of sub-contractors throughout the United Kingdom.

The step that I have announced today represents an important milestone for British airborne technology, in collaboration with our partners, in a major international development project. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On behalf of all my right hon. and hon. Friends, I welcome the Minister's announcement of the contract. I am pleased that, as with the EFA radar contract, it will go to a British-led consortium. The whole House recognises the importance of the contract for the future defence needs of this country and we are pleased that the Minister has been able to lead

[Mr. Allan Rogers]

the negotiations to a successful conclusion. Like him, we are disappointed that Germany has not yet signed up and we hope that it finally will. The implications for our defence industry and for those who work in that declining sector are substantial. I am sure that the news will be most welcome to those whose jobs will now be safeguarded.

Although the news is positive, can the Minister now advise the House on the latest German position on the whole project? He will know, as other hon. Members do, of the considerable doubts being expressed by politicians from all parties in Germany. In the event of the Germans pulling out after the development stage is finalised at the end of the year, what will be the cost and quantity implications for the procurement of the aircraft by the Royal Air Force?

Everyone recognises Marconi's important work in support of our operations in the Gulf. We congratulate Marconi's civilian employees on their work at that time. We hope that the awarding of the contract will help to safeguard our national electronic warfare capability well into the next century. Will the Minister tell us what progress has been made on the procurement of air-to-air missiles for the aircraft?

Mr. Clark: I am glad to get the hon. Gentleman's endorsement, especially in such positive and unqualified terms. I take that as part of the Labour party's approach to defence procurement, which is to tick off each individual project, factory or programme whenever it comes before the House and to say that it fully endorses it. As we all know, that is immediately reflected in the inconsistency of Labour's accounting programme. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] There is nothing ungracious about that comment. The sums are open to anyone who can add or subtract. I welcome the commitment by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). We can accumulate the figures and we can all do our sums.

I do not believe that my statement means that the Germans will not necessarily take the system into the aircraft that they order. However, they could end up by having to buy the system off the shelf, in which case it would be more expensive for them. The only alternative would be to put in an inferior system, which means that the German aircraft would be less capable than those in the other three air forces.

I recognise that periodic doubts are expressed about the overall German commitment to the project. The hon. Gentleman is incorrect in saying that they are shared by all political parties in Germany, although they are shared by some of them, especially the socialist parties. It is not too alarmist in looking to the future——

Mr. Rogers: The Minister does not know what he is talking about.

Mr. Clark: We are talking about the commitment of the Luftwaffe compared to that of some of the other parties. I sometimes wonder whether the Labour party, if it were ever able to do so, would consider cancelling the project and doing so under the alibi of some joint arrangement of approaching German political parties in the future. I have my doubts and I believe that many who are concerned with making the aircraft may bear those thoughts in mind. At present, there is nothing in German policy or in service requirement terms to suggest that the Germans will get out of the aircraft.

On missile capability, as the hon. Gentleman knows and as I have announced in the House, we have invited tenders for the ASRAAM—advanced short-range air-to-air missile—capability and we are evaluating them. I hope to be able to make an announcement in the early spring.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is excellent news for British industry, especially for the British defence industry? Will he pass on our congratulations to all those in the Ministry of Defence and in industry who have worked so hard in co-operation to continue British primacy in the project?

Does my right hon. Friend accept that, as in all co-operative and collaborative ventures, we must try among the allies to minimise the differences over such procurement projects? If we cannot collaborate in future, collectively we shall never be able to afford the best for our forces.

Mr. Clark: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his commendation and for the constructive attitude that the Select Committee on Defence has adopted during the past years in helping us extrapolate the various solutions towards which the project is striving. My hon. Friend put his finger on the importance of co-operation, reaching early agreement and avoiding conflict on all the separate aspects of the collaborative project, but I have no reason to believe that anything untoward is occurring. The agreement on the DASS—the fact that we were able to agree with Italy and Spain to proceed with a system, even though the Germans are currently hesitating, possibly on grounds of economy or operational requirement—seems promising. It shows that the overall project is likely to go ahead even if, at intervals, individual members of the consortium do not participate in a particular system.

Sir David Steel: (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The Liberal Democrats give an unqualified welcome to the statement, which will be good for British technology, jobs and European co-operation. There have been some reports about problems with the flight control system. May we take it that today's announcement means that if there were any, they have been overcome? Would the project continue to be viable even if, unhappily, the Germans were not to adopt it?

Mr. Clark: The project is more likely to be viable if the Germans drop out of it than if the Liberal party's defence programme is ever put in place. I am sure that that programme's ultimate aspiration is for a 50 per cent. cut in defence expenditure. I am entirely confident about the present state of the project. The flight control system is not the same as the defensive aids sub-system—the two are separate—but I have no reason to anticipate any serious hold up with the flight control system.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, while we all want the Germans to stay in the project, should they decide to withdraw from it at the end of the development phase, the aircraft would, if anything, be cheaper for the Royal Air Force and there would be increased employment possibilities in this country?

Mr. Clark: I have heard that assertion, which I find attractive and welcome, but there must be a catch in it

somewhere—more than that I should not like to say. I should certainly not wish the House to believe that a German withdrawal would lead to the whole project falling asunder. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Mr. Mates) said, it is a major international collaborative project, and the skills and technological resources of all the partners are necessary if it is to do itself justice.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): The Minister knows that the statements of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) and of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) confirm that there is all-party support for the project. It is not helpful for the Minister to try to make petty political capital out of the issue. The project is of enormous importance to British industry. The research and development contract alone involves expenditure in the United Kingdom of £2·5 billion. Therefore, his statement on the allocation of the contract to Marconi and his strong reaffirmation about the project's future will be warmly welcomed. Can he confirm that everything is going broadly according to plan and that the first prototype plane is expected to fly at Farnborough this year?

Mr. Clark: I am glad to confirm all those points. I should like to repeat the tributes that I have paid to the hon. Gentleman for the support that he gave all our efforts —across party divides—to ensure that the Ferranti radar system was chosen for the aircraft in the spring two years ago. That system, in common with the others, is proceeding well.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Will my right hon. Friend the Minister continue to press the Labour party and try to establish whether it is committed to the project? I welcome what Opposition Members have said today, as I am sure my right hon. Friend does. However, we are waiting in Bristol to have the largest industrial contract confirmed, but whenever Labour Members visit Bristol, they refuse to confirm their long-term commitment to the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Clark: As I told the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), the Labour party has moved quite transparently into pre-election mode in respect of its attitude to all defence projects. Labour varies its tune according to the audience—a familiar distortion imposed by the pre-electoral pattern. Whenever Labour Members visit a factory or dockyard or stand outside the gate of a defence establishment which is threatened with rationalisation, they say, "Of course, under us, not only would it remain, but it would be expanded and we would put more money into it."

When such reports are brought to the unfortunate right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) periodically and he has to add up another £50 million, £90 million or £120 million, his heart must groan under that extra burden. *[Interruption.]* It was, I believe, a shadow Foreign Minister who came out with a lavish commitment for a fourth Trident submarine in our defence debate a few weeks ago. We could actually hear—never mind see—some of his colleagues wincing as he said that—→

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are getting a little wide of the statement.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I will not be wide of the subject. May we be told precisely why the Germans are hesitating? Is it for operational or economic reasons? The House deserves to know.

Mr. Clark: In that case, if the House really deserves to know, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman visits Germany and uses his well-established contacts there——

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was asking the Minister.

Mr. Clark: Indeed, but I have no responsibility for the German Government. If the hon. Member for Linlithgow were to travel around and frequent the various places where people of that mind foregather, he would probably be able to pick up a few tips and tell us all about it in an Adjournment debate.

I have no responsibility for the German Government. I imagine that, like all Governments, they are subject to the same kind of mix of political pressure, service in-fighting and conflicting operational requirements of one kind or another. However, I am glad to say that that is quite outside my responsibility.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I welcome the Government's unequivocal commitment to the European fighter aircraft represented by this important decision on the defensive aids sub-system. That will be extremely good news for the Royal Air Force and for workers in Stanmore in north-west London. Is my right hon. Friend the Minister aware that it is only a year since the RAF proved in action how important it is to have aircraft of the highest quality with an excellent electronic warfare capability? We are moving in the right direction with the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Clark: I welcome my hon. Friend's comments. Many people who argue against the aircraft—and this is certainly true of the Germans—appear to assume that, now that the cold war is over, combat aircraft development has come to a halt and we can all continue to use the aircraft that we have until they wear out or fall apart. However, there will be a continuing requirement for serious ranking world powers—such as the United Kingdom and other Community countries—to maintain effective equipment within their air forces. Many schools believe that it is not operationally practical to go to the extent of aircraft such as the ATAs—advanced tactical aircraft—that are being developed in America which cost between $70 million and $100 million each. We will have a more versatile, more manoeuvrable and more responsive aircraft, probably with increased range, performance and climbing rates. As my hon. Friend is aware, the Rafale is another example of that. We believe that it is inferior in all those respects to the EFA. There will be such a requirement for an aircraft which will be combat capable in the first 10 or 25 years of the next century.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): The House will welcome my right hon. Friend's statement which demonstrates the Government's commitment to a defence project that is essential in this day and age, despite a peace dividend, for our defence capability and also for our defence industrial capability. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the development stage of the project is still likely to be in the order of £2·5 billion? Will he also

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

tell us when he expects to make a statement on the production phase of the project, which had been expected by the end of this year?

Mr. Clark: I can confirm my hon. Friend's figures. We still expect that the first aircraft will fly at Farnborough. Depending on what happens then and in the months immediately afterwards, I see no reason to deviate from the original forecasts for a statement on production.

Mr. Rogers: May I express my surprise at the way in which the Minister responded to what he acknowledged at the beginning of his statement as constructive support from the Opposition? As the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said, the peddling of untruths by the Conservative party simply for electoral purposes is easily seen through. In every statement, we have always offered our support for the project. We have continually given unequivocal support for it. The Minister knows that, and he is telling untruths if he is suggesting otherwise. Normally, he behaves like a clown, but normally he does so without malice. That is why I was amazed at his response today. He obviously feels under great pressure because of his small majority. *[Interruption.]* It is small.

The reservations in Germany come from all political parties. If he reads the statements of Mr. Hauser, who is a member of the CSU, which is part of the CDU coalition, he will find that such reservations occur across the spectrum.

We do not accept criticism from the Minister. He has been responsible for the loss of 150,000 jobs in the defence industry in the past few years. The cuts that have taken place under "Options for Change" have been Treasury-driven. They were not decided by any grand defensive strategy on behalf of the Government. The Government have lurched from crisis to crisis. They have the cheek to criticise the Labour party's defence policy. Our record on defence since the war is a darned sight better than the Conservative Government's was when they consorted with the Nazis in the 1930s.

Mr. Clark: I am sorry to have wounded the hon. Gentleman. There was nothing personal about it.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is there anything in "Erskine May" that allows you to protect Back-Bench Members and others against flippant answers by Ministers? What have we been asked to do? We have been, in effect, asked to go to Herman Von Richthofen, the German ambassador, and ask him, as I shall do, a perfectly legitimate question—what are the objections to the project of a major industrial power in Europe? All we are told is to go there and see it. The Government are doing the negotiating. I do not think that that is good enough.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that anything in "Erskine May" would enable me to adjudicate on answers to questions, but I understand the reason why the hon. Gentleman has raised that point of order.

Mr. Mans: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raise with you a very important point of order. We have just heard a statement on the most important military project that we have outstanding. The aircraft is built in Lancashire, close to my constituency. I note that not a single Labour Member from Lancashire is here today. Could we therefore, at the earliest opportunity, have not only a statement but a debate on the subject so that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), in particular, and other Labour Members can give their views on this subject, as the hon. Lady has clearly opposed it in the past?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Member should raise that point with the Leader of the House on Thursday, if he catches my eye.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the three motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

TRANSPORT

That the draft International Transport Conventions Act 1983 (Amendment) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Unfair Dismissal (Increase of Limits of Basic and Special Awards) Order 1992 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

Local Government Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

4.39 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Judging by the representation on the Opposition Benches, that is an uncontroversial statement. As this Government's local government policies unfold, and fewer and fewer members of the Opposition parties turn up to oppose us—or even to listen to us or criticise us—it has become self-evident that we are winning the intellectual debate day after day.

The Bill is about preparing local government for the 21st century. It involves a review of all local authorities so that we can bring local government closer to the people. It involves the extension of competitive tendering, which will continue the disengagement of local authorities from direct service provision and which will promote their strategic and enabling roles. The Bill requires the publication of standard performance measures, which will give local electors the information that they need to judge their own council's performance.

The new local government commission for England, which is proposed in part II, will review the structure of local government. It will have a rolling programme of reviews, examining the shire counties area by area, and assessing the case for unitary authorities in those areas. We know that most local authorities want unitary status and we believe that such status will provide a better structure for the future in most areas. However, it will be open to the commission to recommend that there should be no change to the existing structure in some areas. We have already made it clear that we do not intend that either the county or the district tier of the local authorities be abolished as a whole. People want local councils with which they can identify and local people will be given a significant voice in the commission's reviews. I expect to see more unitary authorities with a strong local identity.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I apologise for asking my right hon. Friend to give way so early in his speech, but I intervene on an important point. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that what really matters is the quality and cost of the local government services that are provided to the people whom we represent, yet nothing in the Bill specifically refers to that need as a criterion for change? Before a costly and traumatic reorganisation of the structure of local government is embarked upon, is it not necesary to show ordinary people that demonstrable improvements are available to them as a result of that change and that, without those improvements, there is no case for change?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend raises a most important point. If he studies the draft guidance that we have issued for the local government commission, he will see that we have placed considerable weight on the need to demonstrate that there is an economic case for change. I know that my hon. Friend will be as concerned as I am to consider that part of the legislation which provides for an extension of competitive tendering and which gives the Audit Commission the ability to reveal comparisons between one authority, and one service, and another, which is what he is interested in achieving. I shall come to that part of the Bill in a few moments.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): I too am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend but, as his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) referred to the economic case for change, does he agree that if there is such an economic case for change, it must be made on the basis that where there are unitary authorities, which, as a matter of principle, I strongly support, those authorities must be of an adequate size? If we have endless small unitary authorities, we shall simply add enormously to administrative costs.

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting issue that will involve the House and local government practitioners in much debate in the years ahead. As my hon. Friend and I remember all too well, that was the argument that was made in the early 1970s when it was suggested that we should establish a minimum size standard to cope with the provision of certain services. However, at that time we did not give sufficient attention to the concept of an enabling authority, which has the possibility of buying in services from larger, perhaps neighbouring, authorities. Therefore, it is possible to have both a larger-scale provision of services and more local, smaller-scale authorities which buy in and then provide services. It would be wrong for us to block the option of seeking to have an advantage of scale, through private sector or other public sector providers, while placing the structure much closer to individual people.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a factual point, will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government are looking positively and constructively at the de minimis provision, and at providing an increase from the current level of £100,000 to about £250,000, which was promised in the debate on 17 December last year?

Mr. Heseltine: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for being unable to identify the issue to which he refers. However, if he writes to me, I shall do my best to respond in specific terms. The de minimis provision with which I am familiar cannot be the one about which he is talking, which is the old cut-off point below which capping did not apply. As I do not wish to fail to provide an adequate response to the hon. Gentleman, perhaps he will let me know exactly what de minimis provision he has in mind.

Mr. Dalyell: I am talking about the Scottish authorities and their concern about de minimis provision.

Mr. Heseltine: In that case, the hon. Gentleman can be absolutely sure that he will receive the diligent reply from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), to which he is accustomed.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I am sorry to have to intervene in my right hon. Friend's speech when two important questions have already been asked of him. I hope that he will not be too bored to hear again my concern that we do not make the same mistakes that we made in 1972. Is he aware that there is still widespread anxiety that, when his Department establishes a commission, there will be a hidden agenda on, say, size or functions? What can he say to those of my constituents,

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especially in Christchurch, the priory of which celebrates its 900th anniversary in 1994, to assure them that, contrary to the universally expressed wishes of the local citizenry, they are not likely to be subsumed into some suburban, subtopian and grotesque unit of local government, which they would detest universally, to a man and to a woman?

Mr. Heseltine: I cannot believe that my hon. Friend would suggest that I, of all people, have ever had a hidden agenda—*[Laughter.]* Well, I can assure my hon. Friend that the horrendous spectres which he has waved before us and which the local government commission will doubtless address do not in any way form part of our plans for the future of local government. I hope that my hon. Friend will find that a constructive reply.

Trying to address the issue of local accountability will be a crucial task for the local government commission. We are pleased that Sir John Banham, with his experience at the Audit Commission, has agreed to become the chairman of the new commission when he stands down from the Confederation of British Industry this summer. As I have already said, we have issued a draft of the guidance that we propose to give the commission. Copies have been made available to all hon. Members and we have invited views on the draft by the end of this month. The guidance should require the commission to assess community identities and the impact and effectiveness of any proposed new structure. It will be important for the commission to consider the most effective exercise of functions and the delivery of services, consistent with community identities and the wide public interest.

The commission will be able to obtain advice from other expert organisations, and particularly from the Audit Commission, to assist it in its work. However, it will be the following matters that will influence decisions.

I cannot stress too often that money spent on excessive public relations campaigns will be wasted cash. Although I have said this before, perhaps I may trespass on your tolerance, Madam Deputy Speaker, by repeating this advice to local authorities. They will not enhance their case by employing expensive public relations consultants to spend the local people's money trying to create a synthetic case, which will be looked at in great detail and dispassionately by the local government commission when it begins its work.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I have listened carefully to the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box today. His speech was similar to that which he made when he told us that he would get rid of the poll tax. Is what he is trying to say an apology to the people of Britain who have been struggling under a local government system that has never really worked, ever since the Conservatives put it through the House in 1972? Is it not an admission of failure that he has had to come to the Dispatch Box today and introduce the Bill?

Mr. Heseltine: If what the hon. Gentleman suggests is true, the only apology that is necessary is from the Labour Government who ruled Britain for significant periods after 1972 and did nothing whatever to put the defects right. Once again, when reform is required, it is a Conservative Administration who address the issue.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Apologise.

Mr. Heseltine: If another apology is required, it is from the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) for psyching up the level of community charge bills and encouraging local authorities to increase their expenditure, to add another burden to the tax increases with which we are already threatened by a future Labour Government. *[Interruption.]* Although few Opposition Members are present, I hope that they will allow me to make progress with explaining to the House the merits of yet one more piece of refreshing Conservative legislation.

The Bill sets out a framework for the procedures that the commission will follow in conducting its reviews, including the arrangements for consultation with local authorities, local people and other interested organisations. The commission will initiate a review, with publicity. If appropriate, it will outline proposals or options. There will then be an opportunity for local authorities and other interested parties to put their views.

The commission will then prepare draft recommendations and invite comments on them. We are particularly anxious that local people should put their views on the local government structure that they want to see in their areas. Once the commission has considered comments on the draft recommendations it will draw up final recommendations which it will publish and submit to the Secretary of State for the Environment. If necessary, I can ask the commission to carry out further investigations or, indeed, to supply more information. Finally, an order implementing the commission's recommendations will be laid before Parliament.

As well as conducting reviews of local government structure, the local government commission will take on the work of the Local Government Boundary Commission. It will be responsible for any reviews of boundaries and electoral arrangements which are needed as a consequence of structural review. It will also be able to carry out separate reviews of local government boundaries or electoral arrangements, at my request.

As now, there will continue to be reviews of electoral arrangements at mandatory intervals of not fewer than 10 and not more than 15 years. Therefore, the Bill also provides for the abolition of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Any reviews begun by the Boundary Commission but not completed by the time that it is abolished may be transferred to the new Local Government Commission. Our aim is that the commission should consider the structure of local government area by area so that it can make tailor-made recommendations for each area about the most appropriate structure to meet that area's particular needs and circumstances. That calls for flexibility. Therefore, the Bill provides for parliamentary orders to change the structure of local government area by area. Such orders will be subject to affirmative resolution procedures.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): When my right hon. Friend says "area by area", what does he mean? When the commission gets down to its job, will it look at a county at a time or, in some cases, units smaller than a county? How will the commission decide which areas to select for review?

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend raises an interesting question. We do not anticipate that the areas will be smaller than counties. Indeed, we expect that they will usually include several counties. Undoubtedly, there

are areas where local ambitions or requirements might indicate that cross-county boundary reorganisations are appropriate. For example, in certain areas old counties disappeared. They might reappear and county boundaries might have an effect on the matter.

Part II of the Local Government Bill also contains enabling powers, subject to Parliament, for setting up a residuary body or bodies, or a staff commission or commissions. As the House will know, such bodies have been found helpful in previous reorganisations. But we intend to set them up only if the need for them is clear.

Part I of the Bill deals with competitive tendering. It is almost uncontested by local authorities—at least in private—that competitive tendering has powerfully changed local services for the better.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): What of quality of service?

Mr. Heseltine: If the Labour party intends to abolish competitive tendering, that is an additional interesting revelation about its policies. I am only too anxious to give way if anyone wishes to suggest that there will be no more competitive tendering. It is obvious that the winds of change have blown such socialist nostrums from Labour Members' minds. Competitive tendering is one more item on the long list of items that the Conservative party has implanted in the national culture of how to deliver services.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a difference between competitive tendering and compulsory competitive tendering?

Mr. Heseltine: Yes, there is a difference. In the case of voluntary competitive tendering, Labour authorities do not do it. In that of compulsory competitive tendering, they do.

Research by the Institute of Local Government Studies has shown that work awarded through the competitive tendering procedures costs 6 per cent. less on average, and that in general standards are maintained or improved.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): Will the Secretary of State confirm that only 40 authorities were surveyed by the Institute of Local Government Studies? On page 132, paragraph 13.36, in its conclusion it says:

"Confidence in the financial assessment of the impact of competition must be limited. Outturn figures for the post-tender period are not available. The changing accounting practices that have resulted from competition have made the provision of information and comparisons of cost before and after competition difficult."

In other words, it said that it did not really have the evidence, but it took a good stab at it.

Mr. Heseltine: If the hon. Gentleman is so sceptical about the benefits of competitive tendering, why does he not have the courage to pursue the logic of the argument and say that his party will get rid of it? He knows, as everyone knows, that competitive tendering, imposed where necessary by the Government, has shaken up service delivery standards in local government like nothing that we have seen in recent decades. That is why the Conservative party has the courage to say so, and intends to extend competitive tendering. We will obtain better value for money and higher quality services, despite the worst attempts of the Labour party to frustrate that aim.

The costs have materialised at 6 per cent. less on average and in general terms standards have been maintained or improved. But that is an average position. The truth of the matter is that there are many more extreme examples. No one in the House will forget the state of the city of Liverpool when its trade unions, encouraged by the Labour party, tried their customary strong-arm tactics against the Labour council of the time. We had the unedifying sight of pile upon pile of rubbish towering in the city centre streets. When the city went to tender, the in-house team bid £7·9 million. The private sector bid £3·9 million. The private sector cleaned up the city.

Liverpool was not the only dramatic example. When we used our powers to force Camden council to re-tender its street-cleaning and refuse services, it replaced an ineffective and costly in-house service with a private sector contract that swept the streets and saved the local taxpayer millions of pounds.

So the question remains whether those who oppose compulsory competitive tendering seriously believe that without that process those cost savings and management improvements would have taken place in many local authorities. There is a stunned silence from the Labour Benches because Labour Members know in truth that those improvements would not have taken place without compulsory tendering. The fact is that in the past too many authorities ran their services more for the convenience of their work forces than for the communities that they should have served.

Where authorities, on behalf of their chargepayers, wish to employ an in-house team for these services compulsory competitive tendering has forced them to demonstrate that their team can do the job as efficiently and effectively as an outside contractor. That discipline has meant that they have had to knuckle down and get on with the business of providing services for the citizen, and not jobs for the boys.

We now have to extend competition into local authority white-collar services.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Why?

Mr. Heseltine: Here we go again. The question is again asked immediately. The Labour party says that it will not prevent competitive tendering in respect of the services to which it now applies. I shall be very interested to hear whether the Opposition intend to prevent its extension and thus deprive people of the further enjoyment of improved services.

Last November we published a consultation paper entitled "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services". That document proposes initially to extend CCT to a number of construction-related professional services, such as architecture and engineering, and then eventually to bring the stimulus of competition to a range of core corporate services, such as finance, legal services, personnal and administration. The consultation paper made it clear that we recognise that the existing CCT procedures under the Local Government Act 1988 may need revision for such services.

For the activities already covered by the 1988 Act local authorities decide on the quality of services that they want and then set specifications for the job. Once they have received tenders it is up to them to ensure, in a fair and objective fashion, that tenderers can meet their

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specifications. But in the case of professional and technical services considerations of quality are more complex and more difficult to measure. It is for that reason that we are prepared to consider a modified tendering procedure with a separate quality threshold and double-envelope tendering. This would enable authorities to look at the prices tendered by those who come up to the standards that they and their local communities require and then to judge on the basis of price alone. It is our intention that this Bill will provide powers to modify the existing CCT procedures for the professional and technical services to take account of this and other concerns.

As it stands, clause 8 does not not do that. Instead, it purports to provide a wholly inflexible and unusable power which could not address the particular concerns relating to professional services. It would treat quality in architecture on the same level as quality in refuse collection. I give notice that, in Committee, we shall table amendments to restore the necessary flexibility to this power.

Mr. Dalyell: I wonder whether the Secretary of State can answer a question that bothers West Lothian district council. In the event of the authority's having misgivings as to the capability of the lowest tenderer to maintain a quality service, what remedies are available to it at the tender-evaluation stage? This is a matter that bothers serious people.

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right, and I have just answered his question by my reference to the concept of double-envelope tendering, whereby quality thresholds are set and firms have to ensure that those are met. Above the quality thresholds, it is a question of price. The hon. Gentleman raises a perfectly legitimate question, but it is one that we have anticipated and answered.

Mr. Allen McKay: On the question of quality, it is well known that firms submit tenders even though architects would advise that those firms could not do the job. On paper the costing looks good, but practical experience is another matter. In such a case, would an authority, on the advice of its officers, be able to eliminate a tender?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman must be fully aware that invariably officers advise against competitive tendering techniques. They invariably produce a range——

Mr. Allen McKay *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I have twice given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I want now to reply to his questions.

If we had not introduced the rigour of competitive tendering regimes, we should not have seen the dispersion of activity towards the private sector. Local government, if it had had the will, could have done these things on its own initiative. However, it took legislation to change the minds not only of local polititians but of local officials and, in particular, of the trade unions behind them.

Mr. Allen McKay *rose*——

Mr. Heseltine: I have dealt with the issue, and I wish now to move to the third aspect of what I have to say.

Clauses 8 and 9 contain enabling provisions, and they will not affect local government activities until we bring secondary legislation before Parliament. The consultation paper sets out a number of ways in which we intend to use these enabling powers if Parliament grants them. We shall carefully consider responses to the consultation paper and shall bring forward our proposals for secondary legislation in due course.

I should like now to come to a question that has been raised by Conservative Members—local authority performance standards. Everybody knows that service standards vary. We know about authorities in whose areas rents are not collected and repairs are not done. We know about the bins that are not emptied and about the streets that are not swept. We know that costs too vary. The whole House must know that, in general, costs under Labour authorities are higher than costs under Conservative authorities. It is still true that, on average in local government, a vote for Labour costs the individual payer £80 a year extra.

The citizens charter White Paper promised that electors would be given the information they need to enable them to judge the services provided by their local councils and the costs. Those electors should know that it costs 8·69p per head to collect the rubbish in Tory Wandsworth, and 23·28p—nearly three times as much—in Labour's Camden. They should know that it costs £10,000 per km to maintain the roads of Labour's Lancashire, but only half that in Tory Lincolnshire. We know that these variations exist. *[Laughter.]* I am not surprised that hon. Members find it funny that services in Labour-controlled areas should cost so much more.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my right hon. Friend aware that when the Conservatives were in charge of the Lancashire county council the standard and maintenance of our roads were well above the national average but that they are now below the national average?

Mr. Heseltine: But not in cost. As we should expect, my hon. Friend makes a most eloquent point.

We all know that these variations exist, but the electors should not have to rely on stray admissions to find out what is going on. I refer, for instance, to the admission of Keva Coombes, the former leader of the Liverpool council. In July 1990 *The Independent* quoted him as having confessed:

> "The council's problems are not down to resources, rather inefficiency. It costs four times more to pick up a piece of litter in Liverpool than it does in other areas."

Some hon. Members—you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I among them—will remember Maureen Colquhoun, an ex-Member of Parliament and an ex-councillor in Labour Hackney. She summed up the situation in Hackney in these words:

> "There was only one reason for Hackney council losing seats at the 1990 elections—the total failure of the Labour Group . . . to deliver services. The record is shameful."

She went on to make another observation—and this is a matter of which I have experience and in respect of which I know how she feels. She said:

> "Tenants were not treated as people at all."

These are the words of a former Labour Member of this House describing Labour in local authorities.

We do not think it good enough to rely on these accidental admissions, so clauses 1 to 4 provide the basis for systematic comparisons. Standards of service and costs should be reported on a common basis determined by an independent body. That is what the Bill provides, and the

Audit Commission is already preparing proposals that will allow the public to compare the cost in their area with the cost in other areas of services of similar standards.

Mr. Blunkett: The Secretary of State has made comparisons. Does he believe that all comparisons are fair? Would he say that it is fair to compare the costs for collecting a single tonne of rubbish? Will he confirm that in Wandsworth it costs £39·28 to collect a tonne of rubbish, in Westminster it costs £21·33, but in Haringey it costs £16·62 and in Newham £19·08? Will he confirm that in Chiltern, a Tory-controlled authority in Buckinghamshire, it costs three times as much to collect the rubbish as it does in Labour-controlled Milton Keynes, down the road? If there are to be comparisons, will they be across the board, so that we can see the kind of rubbish that the Secretary of State is talking?

Mr. Heseltine: As on so many other occasions, having listened to what I have had to say, the hon. Gentleman has come round to agreeing with me. We shall give him exactly what he wants—all the statistics for all the services for all the authorities. I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that, because now he will come through the Aye Lobby in support of our Bill. We have another convert on the Labour party Benches.

Mr. Enright: Will the Secretary of State also look at the statistics on additionality in RECHAR areas?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman is as aware as I am that this matter is being carefully considered by the Government, and when we have something to say, we shall make a public statement. However, to the best of my knowledge, that policy is not covered by this Bill. If I am wrong, I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman will correct me, because I have nothing about it in my briefing notes.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): If it is not in the Secretary of State's briefing notes, he cannot say anything about it.

Mr. Heseltine: No. If it is not in my briefing notes, it is not there.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Before he leaves accountability, will my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever the proposed changes that are made, accountability will be achieved only if responsibility and authority are vested in the same pair of hands? Whatever he does in this review of local government, will he ensure that that principle is scrupulously adhered to?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will have heard what I said earlier about the local government commission because it is with the intention of seeing the emergence of more unitary authorities that we are introducing the Bill. My hon. Friend will therefore be able to support us with enthusiasm.

The Audit Commission has issued a paper—"The Citizens Charter: Local Authority Performance Indicators", and I have arranged for copies of it to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The paper sets out the Audit Commission's preliminary thinking on how it would set about its new tasks. The paper is most important and one that the House will want to consider with great care. As I have said, all the figures will be published and the resulting publicity will be a powerful motivator. Authorities will no longer be able to hide behind vague definitions of standards and vague assessments of costs.

Let me make two things clear. First, standards of performance are central to the provisions in clauses 1 to 4 and to the future development of the so-called league tables. There was some confusion about this matter in the other place. The Bill makes it clear that the subject matter of comparisons is to be standards of performance achieved, as is set out in clause 1(1) at the beginning of the Bill. The criteria of comparisons follow, and are cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Secondly, the requirement for the Audit Commission to give directions to local authorities requiring them to give the public information on their performance in no way detracts from the freedom of authorities to decide for themselves what standard of service to provide. The Bill is concerned about the reporting of levels of service delivered. This will enable the public to make their judgment on whether their authority is delivering good value for money.

Clauses 5 and 6 implement another aspect of the citizens charter. In too many cases, local authorities do not respond to their auditors' reports and recommendations. Clause 5 imposes on bodies a new duty to respond promptly, formally and in public to auditors' public interest reports made under section 15 of the 1982 Act.

There are doubts about the ability of the Audit Commission to publish information about individual authorities—in other words, to name names. Clause 7 will enable the Audit Commission to disclose information on which bodies fail to comply with the requirements of performance standards or contravene the accounts regulations—for example, by failing to publish their accounts on time—or are subject to an auditor's report. They could also disclose the contents of such a report and the body's response. I see no case for shielding authorities which do any of those things from the publicity that their performance should properly attract.

Both in the citizens charter provisions and in the proposals for structural reform, the Bill puts the interests of the people first. It will provide voters with the facts about the way that councils discharge their responsibilities. It will extend the benefits of competitive tendering and it will lead to a local government structure that takes account of the needs of each area and of the views of local citizens. I believe that it will lead to a significant advance in the quality of local government, and I commend it to the House.

5.15 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Long-suffering local government has been an all-too-familiar battleground for the major parties over the past decade and that has been particularly true of local government finance and competence, where a vast gulf separates the two major parties and where we have differences of a profound nature not only about the practice of policy but about its objectives.

As we approached the Bill, it was possible to hope for some consensus. After all, who could disagree with some of the Government's stated aims, such as better-quality provision or the restructuring of local government so that it is simpler, more democratic and more efficient in its

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operation? Labour yields to no one in its enthusiasm for those causes. We were there first with our quality street proposals and our proposals for a quality commission.

Labour local government has led the way in practical terms with proposals on how such changes should be implemented. We have been long-standing critics of the 1974 reorganisation. When I represented Southampton, Test I was a strong supporter of what we then described as organic change—a champion of the county boroughs, of their rights and of their capacity to run their own affairs.

Therefore, in principle, we should be able to look for consensus on the Bill, but I am sorry to say that it is simply not possible on the basis of the Bill. The Government have thrown away a chance because they take too narrow a view of how to achieve quality and of what quality means in local government services and because they have been unable to approach the issue of structure in anything other than a spirit of narrow, party advantage.

We have no difficulty in supporting the provisions in the first part of the Bill that require publication of information on the performance of local government. Indeed, we would go well beyond the Government in demanding the public setting of standards, the provision of information to citizens and the ability of citizens to monitor those standards and demand redress when they are not met.

The Government have been hopelessly narrow in their definition of what should be measured. True to form, they are concerned exclusively with cost. They do not concern themselves with the quality of provision. They are looking for an accountant's measure, which will always suggest that cheapest is best. We believe that, on the contrary, quality of provision does matter and that local communities should be able to decide for themselves what quality of service they want. That judgment will necessarily differ from one locality to another. The needs of one community will be very different from those of another.

The circumstances in which a service is to be delivered will vary enormously from one area to another. That factor alone means that the Government's proposals and their insistence on an across-the-board, national set of measures are deficient in terms of the definition of what is to be measured and in respect of how it is to be done. There is no provision in the Bill for local variation—unlike the Government's national health service charter, in which the importance of locally set standards taking account of local needs and circumstances is recognised. Nor is there any recognition of the complexity of the measurements that are to be attempted if fairness is to be achieved and like is to be measured with like. Even a simple task such as grass cutting, for example, cannot be measured unless we are clear about many variables, such as the length of the grass and frequency of cutting. That is—*[Interruption.]* It is easy to laugh, and I know that the point sounds a small one, but how is such a measure to be used and relied upon? If that is true of grass cutting, imagine the difficulty of measuring the quality of more complex services.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The hon. Gentleman has said that the Government's approach is an accountant's approach. It seems that he and I were listening to a different speech. I thought that I heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say that, even where service arguments and cost arguments demand large areas, local people might want small areas. Was not my right hon. Friend saying that if people want small areas, that is what they should have? That is exactly the opposite of what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman must be doing his best to confuse the House generally. He has intervened on an issue that does not arise at this stage in my speech. I shall gladly deal with restructuring later. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will try to follow the argument a little more closely. If he does so, he will be able to judge more accurately when to advance his prepared arguments.

The Government should recognise the problems to which I have referred, at least to the extent of acknowledging that a good deal more work must yet be done on performance criteria by the Audit Commission —the report that it is publishing is most welcome—and by local government, so that there is at least an attempt to reach agreement between the commission and local government before local authorities are, in effect, put in the dock by the Government.

The Government's accusatory attitude remains the main thrust of part I. There is the suggestion that local government is inherently inefficient. If not, why is there the emphasis on cost? Why not measure rather more important matters and rate local councils in accordance with their success in delivering important services such as meals on wheels or nursery school places? If we are to measure, let us measure things that are important. I assure the Secretary of State that if that sort of measurement is undertaken the pecking order will be rather different from the one which he has suggested.

That is our main criticism of the citizens charter, on which the Bill, at least in part I, is based. Every page of the charter is redolent of the view that the only thing to be done with public service—especially local government service—is to privatise it or to import the so-called disciplines of the marketplace. The charter is a pathetically inadequate document which has come and gone virtually unnoticed. Even the Government have recognised that it has been a non-event, as is shown by the need to relaunch it later this week. Its impact so far has been zero, apart from its being said that the Prime Minister is pleased with the improved public recognition that he has enjoyed as a result of wearing his own name badge.

The charter is a document without any content. It is an attack on failures for which the Government are responsible. Those are failures of funding and of understanding local government. The charter's prescriptions miss the point and merely reflect the Government's prejudices.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): If the citizens charter has had no impact, how is it that the portion of it that is called the patients charter has had to be reprinted, and has so far sold nearly 1 million copies?

Mr. Gould: If my experience is anything to go by, I imagine that it has been reprinted many thousands or millions of times. The patients charter arrived through the mail at great cost to the taxpayer, no doubt. When I bothered to read it I found that it contained nothing of any value. Everything that it promised was contradicted by the experience of patients in the NHS.

If we really want improvements in service delivery, we should be looking to Labour's quality commission

proposals. Labour local government already has an impressive track record. It has pioneered customer contracts, customer care training and the provision of immediate redress if things go wrong. It is significant—I say this in response to all those ignoramuses on the Conservative Benches who laugh—that when the Government were drawing up the citizens charter they made a discreet approach to—guess who? The answer is the Labour party. They approached us to ask us whether we could send them a handful of the brochures that had been produced by Labour local authorities on customer care contracts, on customer care training and on the provision of redress. It was to those Labour authorities, such as York, Islington, Oxford, Norwich, Harlow and North Tyneside—I could go on because the list is long—that the Government turned for practical examples when they were drawing up a citizens charter.

This part of the Bill is a great disappointment. It is too narrow, too doctrinaire and too permeated with a lack of sympathy for local government. It is all too typical of the charter, of which it is, sadly, all too predictably a manifestation.

That is even more true of the next subject that is tackled by the Bill. The intention here—this was reiterated by the Secretary of State—was to extend the provision of compulsory competitive tendering to a range of professional services, despite the lack of any evidence that such an extension was either desirable or practicable. It might have been thought that before any such enterprise was undertaken it would be sensible to survey the effects of CCT so far. The Government have failed to do that. The studies undertaken have been partial and inconclusive. The only conclusion that can be drawn from the work undertaken by the Institute of Local Government Studies and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy is that small cost savings in service delivery of about 6 to 7 per cent. have been at the very least matched and offset by the costs of the tendering process. That is to say nothing of the costs that have not been measured, such as the costs of corners cut in service delivery and of the downward pressure on wages and working conditions, which are already shamefully low.

That is why we believe that the way forward is not through compulsion. A Labour Government will largely remove the element of compulsion, reserving it only for use when a local authority has shown over a period that it has failed to meet acceptable standards. We do not accept that there is any case for extending CCT purely on ideological grounds. The Government have not been able to show any evidence for doing so. They have refused to publish the PA report that they commissioned, presumably because they felt—as it turned out, quite rightly—that the report provided no support for their prejudices. They were duly embarrassed when the report was leaked. It showed that in respect of some of the services proposed for CCT—legal services, for example—costs were substantially higher in the private sector than in the public sector. It showed that no market exists for other services and that process costs would outweigh any cost advantages in yet further examples.

The Government, true to form, were undeterred. They pressed ahead, issuing a consultation document and specifying that consultation would end on 31 January, conveniently after the Bill had received a Second Reading in both Houses. So much for consultation.

The consultation paper was hardly free from mystery. The Prime Minister went out of his way last year to specify housing management as a prime candidate for the extension of CCT, yet it is not mentioned in the document. Perhaps the Minister of State will be able to resolve the mystery of whether housing management is in or out. I see the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) courteously waiting to intervene, but on the point of leaping to his feet. If he wishes to intervene, I shall gladly give way.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman is basing much of his case on the PA Consultants' report, yet his noble Friend Lord McIntosh described it as poorly written and inaccurate. The hon. Gentleman says that he believes every word of it. The Opposition cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Gould: My noble Friend Lord McIntosh is entitled to make his own judgment of the report's literary style; I am entitled to put the report's conclusions before the House. I have taken the trouble to spare the hon. Gentleman the pain of listening to the language used in the report, which I have paraphrased. However, I assure him that not only are the conclusions impeccable, but so are the language and the grammar.

Even the Government were forced to recognise in the debate in the other place that, if competition was applied to many services according to ordinary principles, it would be most unlikely that the private sector would get much of a look in. The Government accordingly proposed a quality threshold. The very phrase should send a shiver down the spine, in the light of the television franchise debacle. At the same time, they resolutely refused to recognise that any reference to quality was needed in the services already subject to CCT. If it is right for one group of services, why is it irrelevant to others? Who is to decide the quality threshold? Is it, as the Secretary of State implied, to be him? Is it, as one of his noble Friends conceded late in the debate on the Bill in the other place, to be for local authorities to set that threshold?

Not surprisingly, their Lordships objected to the whole farrago of nonsense and prejudice and they wrecked the Government's proposals, not least on the ground that the Henry VIII clause—part of clause 8—was a constitutional monstrosity. Unfortunately and sadly, as we heard from the Secretary of State, the Government intend to override their Lordships and to restore a provision that has no defenders outside the ranks of the Government's ideologues. We shall resist that restoration.

Part II of the Bill is an even greater disappointment and an even bigger missed opportunity. We have always made it clear that the 1974 reorganisation had failed and that what was needed was a simpler, more comprehensible, more accountable unitary structure for local government. The Secretary of State appeared to accept that, too, so we looked to common ground on that score.

We also supported the idea of a commission that would attempt to measure local needs and interests and come forward with flexible answers to suit local circumstances. We made it clear that if such a commission were properly set up, comprised a proper balance of people and interests, and had sensible terms of reference, an incoming Labour Government would be glad to pick up its work and to act on its conclusions. Those hopes have been dashed by the provisions of the Bill. I say nothing about the membership

[Mr. Gould]

of the commission, which presumably has not yet been decided, but the heart sinks at the prospect of the Secretary of State's yet again being unable to resist the chance to play party politics.

We are, however in a position to judge the terms of reference of the commission, and they fill us with alarm and despondency. Apparently, it will roam the countryside, guided only by the whim of the Secretary of State, proposing or not proposing—as the case may be—change which may or may not introduce unitary government in one part of the country rather than another. Its recommendations, again subject to whim, will be made and implemented piecemeal and over a long period. It is impossible to imagine a surer recipe for confusion than what the Secretary of State proposes. At any given time, some parts of the country will have unitary and others dual forms of local government. Some will be in the course of change, others threatened with change, yet others absolved from change, with others not knowing what to expect. No one with an ounce of understanding of local government could contemplate such chaos with equanimity.

Mr. Wilshire: I wish to take up the hon. Gentleman on his point about some authorities having unitary and others having dual forms of local government. I am against two-tier authorities, but if local people matter as much as the hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say they do, we should not rule out what local people want, even if he and I think that to be wrong. Is he againt local variation and against local people? Does he still want to dictate from the centre?

Mr. Gould: The hon. Gentleman must be a very late convert to that view.

It is remarkable that the Government so lack confidence in their espousal of unitary government that they dare not use that principle to frame the terms of reference of the commission. They are not only a sure recipe for confusion, but they entirely fail to deal with some of the fears about, for example, major environmental responsibilities such as the future of structure plans, whose importance Labour is committed to emphasise, and the role of specialist services such as the county archivists. The terms of reference exclude that potentially—indeed, actual—valuable element of local government, the local parish and community councils. They should feature prominently in any future reorganisation of local government.

Most surprising of all is the refusal to recognise the demand for a Londonwide administration for our capital city. The great majority of Londoners—this is shown by all opinion polls—know all too well the price that they pay for the absence of any Londonwide voice, and the handicap that our capital suffers in comparison with other major cities at home and abroad. Even Tory voices, ranging from the chairman of the Tory party—although somewhat muted, it is true—to Lady Porter, recognise that something has to be done. However, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister, for once united, are frozen in indecision. They have decided that Londoners must make do without the benefit of a strategic body to plan the capital's future and that London must be excluded from the Bill. They will pay a price for that indecision and the next Labour Government will specifically remedy the omission.

The Bill is, in the end, the Secretary of State's Bill. It reflects his peculiarly partisan approach to all these issues. It is local government's misfortune that he brings to his task a perspective that is too narrow, too partisan and too lacking in understanding of what local government is about and the value of the contribution that it can and must make. Local government now needs a proper debate about its true role and function and an appreciation of the importance of decentralising power in a hopelessly over-centralised country. From that debate should flow conclusions about the best structure for local government. Function should determine structure, not the other way round.

The structure should be decided in the long-term interests of local government and the communities that it serves. It should not be influenced by short-term and partisan considerations about where party advantage might lie. It should not be driven by a passion for centralisation and a determination to strip local government of its remaining functions and independence. Yet the Secretary of State's personal style and his record in local government inevitably lead to the conclusion that that is precisely what he is about. We do not trust him and neither does local government. That is why the twin objectives of the Bill—quality services and a democratic and efficient structure for local government—must wait for their achievement until the election of a Labour Government.

5.38 pm

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): Parts of the speech of the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) were astonishing, especially his latter remarks and his attack on part II of the Bill. If we do not proceed in the way outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, we shall be condemned to many years of uncertainty before any change is made in the structure of local government. My understanding of what the hon. Gentleman was saying was that there should be a long debate and then a future Labour Government—should there be such an animal—would put forward proposals, which would then be subject to major legislation. The hon. Gentleman is putting off the day of reform for many, many years. That may be the wish of some members of the Labour party, but it is not the view reflected in the other place. It certainly does not reflect the views of many Labour party supporters. Indeed, in my constituency, Labour party members are among the most enthusiastic supporters of part II. The hon. Gentleman made a misguided attack on the Bill.

I welcome both parts of the Bill, and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the further moves towards competitive tendering and contracting out. My local authority, Southend, was one of the first to contract out its refuse collection services—a move that has been outstandingly successful, and is now entirely non-controversial. A much better and more economical service is now provided. That is only one example of what local authorities can achieve—and, indeed, are increasingly achieving throughout the country.

Part II, which deals with the structure of local government, is the most crucial section. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the reforms of the early 1970s, no one

can claim today that they have met with popular support. They have proved unpopular in many areas where services could previously be provided much closer to hand.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And more cheaply.

Mr. Channon: In many cases, yes.

I represent part of what used to be one of the old county boroughs. It seems to me, in retrospect, that that was an excellent arrangement. It allowed decisions to be made at a "responsive" level: it enabled people to feel that they had some control over their local authorities. When the education committee met, for example, everyone knew every school that was up for discussion. Everyone knew which school needed more money. The old system provided more accountability as well as less remoteness, and I suspect that people in virtually all the old county borough areas regret the changes that were made. My constituents certainly do. But I make no criticism of the county council that took over my borough. Despite the inevitable remoteness that has followed the change, that council has proved both effective and economical.

If we are to change the structure of local government —a proposal that has, I believe, been widely welcomed —what should be our aim? Clearly—as my right hon. Friend explained—it should be to provide high standards of public service at a reasonable cost to the citizen, and to respond to the wishes of local people. If the word "subsidiarity", as used by Mr. Delors, has any meaning, it surely applies to local government: decisions should be made as near to the people as is conceivably possible.

I am sure that I am right in expecting my right hon. Friend to ensure that the new local government commission is open to new ideas. After all, he has said in his consultation document that he wants an enabling authority. That, I think, is the direction in which local government will move in the next few years. More services will be provided outside the traditional field of local government. When all schools have their own local management, the structure of local government will be affected; when a vast number of schools become grant maintained—as I confidently expect them to do—the impact will be enormous. If, as I expect, there is a dramatic increase in the number of applications, local authorities will have a smaller role to play.

If we look ahead to a time several decades from now —as we should at least try to do—we should ask how we want services to be administered. I do not see why a national blueprint should be laid down; administration may well be different in different parts of the country. Both my right hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Dagenham mentioned housing. The increase in the role of housing associations—an even greater increase than the one that we are seeing now—will mean a smaller role for local authorities, and a greater role for individuals. I have already mentioned some aspects of contracting out.

We do not want local government for local government's sake. We want to provide the best possible standard of service, and I believe that that can be done differently in different parts of the country. Whatever unit of local government finally emerges will, I think, be able to delegate downwards if it wishes, conferring on local communities many of the functions that local authorities now perform.

I am convinced that, in most instances, unitary authorities provide the best solution; but I do not see why the hon. Member for Dagenham should attack my right hon. Friend for enabling parts of the country that may wish to retain two-tier authorities to do so. I know that some of my hon. Friends feel strongly that the dual system is better for their areas. If that is so, good luck to them: why should we try to lay down the unitary system as a general principle? The point of part II, surely, is to give the citizen more say in deciding what form of local government should operate in his area. Most, I believe, will choose the unitary system, but if some do not want that, let them get on with it.

Mr. Martlew: Is the right hon. Gentleman suggesting that, when the proposals are ready, they should be put to a referendum so that people can choose the form of local government that they want?

Mr. Channon: I doubt that that will be necessary in most areas; but it is essential—and, indeed, it is clearly laid down in the consultation document—that the decision that is finally reached should be reached by the vast majority of local people. People in my part of the country would be in no doubt about what they wanted. *[Interruption.]* I have seldom been more convinced that I am right than in this instance. I am not opposed to the idea of a referendum if that is what people want, but I think that in most cases it would be unnecessary. Of course, if the hon. Gentleman's point is that the decision must be welcomed by the majority, he is entirely right. The White Paper provides for a presumption in favour of unitary authorities unless clear reason is given for different arrangements to be adopted.

I should like to know more about the local government commission. How will it carry out its enormous task? Who, for example, will set its programme of work? Will the commission decide how to proceed, or will my right hon. Friend say, "Tackle Avon now, Cornwall next and Essex after that"? That question has prompted a good deal of interest.

In another place, the Minister of State implied that a history of dissatisfaction with the existing structure would be a factor. I hope that that is true; if so, I concede the prime claims of Avon and Humberside. None the less, I wish to draw to the Government's attention the need to deal soon with the problems of Essex, and particularly those of Southend. As in many other ex-county boroughs, there exists in my area a community of interests—as laid out in the consultation paper—and a strong desire not to change the boundaries that existed under the old system, or to become predatory.

I hope that the areas in which dissatisfaction is known to exist will be among the first to be dealt with. I also hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to tell us a little about timing. When will this great process be finished? It is a long and arduous business, and we shall all be kept in uncertainty for quite some time unless rapid progress can be made in areas where agreement is likely.

Will the commissioners split up into different groups, or will all, or only one, carry out each review? Timing, about which there is so much uncertainty, is not only important to the local population; it is crucial to local authority employees. Is the commission big enough? Will there be enough people to do the work in a reasonable period?

My right hon. Friend mentioned costs. I am disturbed by the figures that have been revealed in this week's *Local Government Chronicle* about the costs that local

[Mr. Channon]

authorities incur in defending their position. We do not want ridiculously expensive solutions to be adopted at the expense of charge payers—and, later, ratepayers—whose money might be squandered on unnecessary reports. I welcome my right hon. Friend's condemnation of such practices, and hope that he will say more.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) challenged me on the need for a local referendum. I agree with him strongly that we need to consult the people before a decision is reached. Could we have some guidance about that from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment?

Mr. Enright: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Channon: No. I have already given way on that point. All I am saying is that there must be adequate consultation so that we ensure that the community that becomes a local authority agrees with the decision.

I welcome the Bill. I suspect that most people welcome it. I am surprised that the Opposition intend to vote against it, just like that. Although I disagree with it, I understand their opposition to part I. However, to vote against reforming local government in this quick and efficient way strikes me as very surprising. The only consolation is that it will be extremely popular. That will encourage us in the weeks and months that lie ahead. I hope that the Bill will soon become law and that before too much time has elapsed these welcome changes will be in place.

5.50 pm

Mr. Gordon Oakes (Halton): I intend to speak about part II. I assure the Secretary of State for the Environment that we are opposed not to the principle of revision of local government but to the ridiculous way in which the Government are attempting to do it. The Opposition will therefore vote against part II, just as we shall vote against part I. Before I deal with part II, may I say how much I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said about part I, particularly in his closing remarks.

What the Conservatives do in general and what the Secretary of State for the Environment does in particular is to build up an image of Labour local authorities. That may apply in a few cases, but it does not apply to the vast majority of Labour local authorities, including my own. The Secretary of State extends that image beyond Labour local authorities; it embraces local government in general, including Conservative local authorities. Unfortunately, we do not now benefit from many Members of Parliament, particularly Conservative Members of Parliament, having served their apprenticeships, before coming here, as local government members. Many Members of Parliament used to serve on local, district and county councils—even on parish councils. They knew what they were talking about.

It is nonsense for the Conservative Government to say that they introduced competitive tendering during the last 10 years. There has been competitive tendering in local authorities for generations. What the Conservatives introduced was a narrow basis of compulsory tendering. What the Conservative party has done generally and what the Secretary of State has done today in particular is to build up an image and then to attack it.

I prefer what my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham said about the Bill. It is a last vindictive attempt by a dying Government to take a swipe at local government, local democracy and locally-elected people —devoted men and women, of all parties and of none, who are trying to do a good job. They were elected on the same franchise as Members of Parliament. We are here to do a job. They are there to do a job. They try to do that job to the best of their ability. They face the electoral consequences if they do not do so. They should not be put upon by a Secretary of State who wants to be able to tell them how they should do their job. That has been a characteristic of every Act of Parliament relating to local government that has reached the statute book since 1979.

The Bill expands the categories to which part I applies. It embraces the legal system, architects, library services, archivists and archaeologists. All these tasks are now performed by local government on a very cost-efficient basis. The Opposition object to the fact that these services are being driven, by dogma, into the private sector, regardless of the quality of the service provided.

Mr. Wilshire: The hon. Gentleman makes the point that competitive tendering implies dogma, but does he not agree that to say, as he appears to say, that local government is the only and the best way to provide these services is also dogma?

Mr. Oakes: If it is dogma, it is the dogma of democracy. It is the dogma of believing that those who are elected to do a job do it. It is ridiculous for the Government to proceed in this way. It will affect quality. Moreover, the widest possible powers will be given to the Secretary of State. He will be able to decide, on whim, what services shall be privatised and what services shall not be privatised. What is even worse, he will be able to decide, on whim, that services shall be privatised in one part of the country but not in another. Local government will not have the slightest idea of what he intends to do under part I.

Compulsory competitive tendering will apply to the most minute services. I wonder how the Department of the Environment will police it. For instance, a row is going on in my constituency between the admittedly Labour-controlled but very efficient Halton borough council and the Department of the Environment. The Department served a section 12 notice under the 1988 Act regarding the refuse collection service. I am still waiting to hear from the Secretary of State about the matter.

The one service about which I have never received a single complaint, either in my surgery or by letter, is the refuse collection service in Halton. The Department of the Environment issued a notice saying that Halton had not fairly operated its refuse collection service under the 1988 Act. It transpires that the saving involved is about £9,000. That is the difference between the provision of the existing service and the next highest tender. The Department of the Environment notice included the words

"It has come to our notice".

There had not, apparently, been a complaint from any of the other tenderers. Who brought it to the Department's notice? Does it carry out spot checks on what local authorities are doing? Even if it carries out spot checks on big services, such as refuse collection, I do not know how the Department could carry out spot checks on small services such as the archaeological unit.

The Secretary of State inhabits the building that I once inhabited as a junior Minister. When I reached the Department of the Environment my first impression was that it must look exactly like the headquarters of the former KGB in Russia. It looks that sort of place. The Department seems to be behaving in a similar manner. How many staff are involved in checking local authority tenders when the difference involves a mere £9,000? That is and must be dogma.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Even in the commercial sector, if a tender is 3 per cent. lower than the in-house bid, is it not usual for that tender not to be accepted because the margin is thought not to be large enough for it to result in real value for money and efficiency?

Mr. Oakes: I cannot give the exact figure, but the figure would be far less than 1 per cent.

I turn now to part II which deals with the dramatic restructuring that will be entailed. I have to declare to the House not a financial interest but the fact that I am the honorary vice president of the Association of County Councils and that I have held that post for many years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is an honorary position, but I declare it so that the House knows exactly where I stand on the matter. No money is involved. In fact, the position costs me money.

I remind the Government that our county council structure is the oldest, the biggest and, I would argue, the most cost-effective tier of local government, yet it has few friends in Government, or on the Conservative Benches. I regret to say that it has even fewer friends on this side of the House.

The ancient structure of county council government should not be abolished or castrated to the extent that it exists in name only. I argue that because of its age, antiquity and long-standing nature. I am proud to have been born in Lancashire. Other hon. Members are equally proud to have been born in Yorkshire. In fact, people who were born in Kent, Durham, Cornwall, Cumbria or Cheshire are proud to have been born in those counties.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): The hon. Gentleman's point will attract some traditional local support. My constituents thought that they were born and lived in Lincolnshire, but since 1974 they have lived in a place with which they have no sympathy—Humberside. They want the commission to get rid of Humberside and to return to the old county structures.

Mr. Oakes: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I served on the Committee that bitterly opposed the ideas of the then Conservative Government, yet no notice was taken of his constituents' concerns. I would not object to the old east riding and Lincolnshire again becoming two separate counties because their marriage has been unnatural and uneasy.

At the end of the loyal toast, even in London, where I should not do so, I still toast the duke of Lancaster. Overseas visitors look at me strangely because they think that I am muttering a Jacobite treachery. But someone across the room will be saying the same thing. We look at each other and ask, "Where are you from?" I am sure that such territorial bonds exist in all areas—and rightly so.

Under the 1972 Bill, the part of Lancashire where I was born was transferred to Cheshire. I owe an allegiance, dedication and devotion to my new county of Cheshire, but that would not be true if it had been removed into some region. Unless the Government are strict in the guidelines that they issue, such problems may arise under part II of the Bill.

I fear and distrust the joint arrangements that can be made under the Bill. I know that the Secretary of State has advised the commission to be careful about joint arrangements, but the Government's draft guidance makes it clear that if unitary authorities are to be based on existing districts, joint arrangements will be needed in many counties for existing services such as police, magistrates courts, probation, fire, emergency planning, probably for strategic planning and for education and social services.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): No.

Mr. Oakes: The hon. Gentleman says "No", but what does "joint committees" mean? It would mean not unitary local government with authorities being individually responsible for services but an expensive, bureaucratic hotchpotch of unselected bodies and committees unaccountable and unintelligible to the public, unable to switch resources between each other and arguing endlessly about crucial decisions.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My right hon. Friend is warning the House about the situation that has arisen in London following the abolition of the Greater London council. Londoners do not know whom they can hold to account for lousy services. That is the point: the Bill removes democratic accountability.

Mr. Oakes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although the Government say that this should be the exception rather than the rule, as the great Nye Bevan used to say, "Why look into the crystal ball when you can read the book?" The Greater London council and the other metropolitan councils show what will happen. More than 60 per cent. of metropolitan counties became three joint boards for police, fire and civil defence and transport. It would be worse if that were to happen to existing shire counties, because education and social services would have to be added to that list. Unless the Government are careful in their guidelines, I foresee such danger from the creation of joint boards.

Another example of what happens when a metropolitan council breaks down occurred in my constituency just before Christmas. There was a major chemical breakdown in Halewood, which is in the metropolitan borough of Knowsley. Unusually, the wind was blowing from the east, so the spill out blew towards the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton). Had the wind blown from the west—as it does usually—it would have gone over my villages of Hale and Halewood, over the river to western point and perhaps even further afield. Neither Halton council nor Cheshire council was notified under the emergency procedures. Hospitals and ambulances were not alerted. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, that is the purpose of joint boards. The hon. Member for Mossley Hill is rightly pursuing the incident on behalf of his constituents, but he cannot discover who is responsible. That will happen again unless it is carefully dealt with in the Bill.

[Mr. Oakes]

County councils are pretty cost-effective bodies. There are about 28,000 employees per county council, yet only six out of 100 are in central administration. No other tier of local government can make such a claim. No county council invested in BCCI; county councils are prudent bodies. Europe is now used to dealing with county councils, but I cannot see it dealing with joint boards. Such a concept is unknown to Europeans.

I plead with the Government to instruct the commission carefully to consider the ancient tier of county government. If it did not exist, I am sure that it would be necessary to invent it. If it is abolished, another local government review will quickly reinstate it.

6.8 pm

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): I am pleased to speak in the debate. I have great regard for the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) and his knowledge of local government, but I think that as vice president of the Association of County Councils he has received its brief and decided to speak on its behalf. That is not the purpose of the debate. We should consider the Bill impartially, but I understand his strong feelings.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he had never received any complaints about refuse collection. When I am in London, I live in Lambeth. I am on the board of directors of my block of flats—an unpaid job—which asked me to contact Lambeth borough council about the street refuse. I wrote to its chief executive. I said that perhaps it had become too difficult and that the council had decided not to collect refuse any more, because the streets are filthy and the collection service is appalling. One cannot say that there are no problems with refuse anywhere. Of course, standards vary and they may be good in Halton—they are not that bad in Reading—but the services should be put out to contract wherever possible.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that I also live in Lambeth, in a block of flats inhabited by many other hon. Members, including some Tories. I also belong to the management committee which consists of residents. We have never had any problems with refuse collection in my block of flats, so it is highly misleading, to say the least, to suggest that Lambeth in general has massive problems. The experience described by the hon. Gentleman is not so widespread.

Sir Anthony Durant: I shall invite the hon. Lady for a cup of tea and to look around my block of flats. I shall then look around hers and we can settle the argument in that way.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I live in the same block of flats as the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). It is interesting that she talks about rubbish collection but forgets the street cleaning, which is disgraceful. The streets are absolutely filthy—and that is Lambeth's direct services.

Sir Anthony Durant: I must get back to my speech because we seem to have begun a dialogue about Lambeth's streets and refuse. However, they provide a good example of the necessity to contract out.

I am delighted with part I of the Bill and what are called performance checks which are essential. The electorate knows too little about how their services are managed and whether they are cost-effective. The more that can be revealed the better. Were it not for their lack of knowledge, people would express views about what is going on.

My local council spends wildly. I must not mention the subject of bollards. The last time I did so, I swore in the House and Mr. Speaker—rightly—rebuked me. He said that it had gone too far even for Reading. The mayor had to write to Mr. Speaker saying that Reading was not so bad. Nevertheless, Reading council has spent vast sums on bollards costing £100 each and they have been put everywhere. The council has spent all the reserves that the Tories had before it took control. It has not collected the rents and is far behind in collecting the community charge. It is a Labour council. We need the Audit Commission to check what each local authority does, and that is why I welcome part I of the Bill.

Competitive tendering is essential. I said that refuse collection was not too bad in Reading, and the reason is that it has been put out to competitive tender. The dustmen made a bid and reduced their costs by about 50 per cent., so they cannot have been running the service very efficiently. Clearly, competitive tendering works and we must do more to encourage it.

I wish to spend most of my time on part II of the Bill, which deals with the necessary setting up of the local government commission. The electorate is confused about who does what. When one knocks on doors, one finds that people do not know what Berkshire county council does as opposed to what Reading does. That is understandable. It is not the electorate's fault that it does not know who does what. That is one of the weaknesses of a two-tier system. It is essential to create unitary authorities, and that is the right way to proceed. I look forward to its happening.

I regret the loss of the county boroughs. It was a good system of local government. Reading was a county borough——

Mr. Enright: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the principal reasons why the Conservative Government reformed local government in 1972 was the inefficiencies of the county boroughs? It was the county boroughs which were destroyed by the Tory legislation in 1972.

Sir Anthony Durant: I was not here, so I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question, but I know about the county borough system in Reading. I can speak only as I find locally and, as I said, the system worked extremely well and was popular there. I do not necessarily agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I accept that he has his own view.

There is a fear, especially among those representing county councils, about education. I was a district councillor on Woking urban district council, as it was then. We were an excepted district under the education system and we managed 26 schools, and did so, I believe, reasonably competently. We appointed the heads and the rest of the staff and we considered their budgeting. I think that we ran a good system. Therefore, I do not think that there is any handicap in setting up a unitary authority at the lowest level which could also run education. We have now increased local management of schools and many schools are opting out, so why should not we let the local

district run education at a unitary level? There is nothing wrong with smaller units. That is one of the arguments that the counties use with which I do not necessarily agree.

On the local government commission, I agree that we should not merely draw a lot of lines on a map, which is what happened the last time. I was on the receiving end of that reorganisation as I was on the district council and was chairman of the committee which was supposed to carry out the reorganisation. It was a confused period. I do not foster the previous idea of drawing lines on a map and putting chunks here and there. It must grow like Topsy —the commission must consider the issues in their broadest sense and must make recommendations.

However, we must urgently consider our historic cities. They are part of our national heritage and it was perhaps a mistake to take local government responsibility away from them. They have civic traditions, community interests and civic pride and a unitary state that could be well run. As hon. Members may know, such historic cities are waging a campaign, and I should like to foster that idea. Their philosophy is right—they are trying to re-establish themselves. They demand that we proceed with that idea before some others, but that is a matter for discussion.

The Secretary of State is on record as saying that size should not be the be-all and end-all; it should be possible to have small and large units. As has been stated, we can buy in the services. We must consider the issues more broadly. We must consider the region as a whole to determine how things fit in and take account of local demand, of what local people want. They want to be associated with the area that governs them. If they are citizens of Reading, they want to be part of Reading and to know that Reading town rules them. Whether Reading is good, bad or indifferent is not the point. They want to feel that it is their town and they want to be governed by it, not necessarily by a county.

As several hon. Members, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon), have said, uncertainty will be a problem. There will be uncertainty, so we must get on with the job as fast as possible. In cases where everyone agrees on a tidy change, there is no harm in getting on. I do not agree with the Opposition that it will be chaotic if one thing is done and one thing is not. There is no problem with that. Why should not it be done one piece at a time?

There is no doubt that each level will fight for its existence. I agree with the Secretary of State, who condemned the expenditure of counties and districts in fighting their corner. That is a complete waste of money. The commission will be independent and will make its own judgment. It will not be influenced by a public relations company producing a smart glossy brochure. That must be stopped as a matter of urgency. My advice is, "Let's get on with it."

I strongly support the Bill and want to see implemented the changes that it proposes so that we can get people closer to the local government that they want.

6.18 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): After almost 13 years in government and after the horrors of the 1974 reorganisation which most of us can remember, it is right that the Government should now introduce these proposals. I warmly welcome them, especially those in part II of the Bill.

I hope that the Government will seek cross-party consensus in favour of people in local communities. If the Government take that as their trust, it will gather momentum and the reforms could work. We all know that in 1974 the reforms did not work.

My party's contribution on this occasion is set against the background of its either being in control or sharing control of about one quarter of local authorities. After six years on a town council, 12 years on a district council and 11 years on a county council, I feel that my 15 years' service—29 years' service in all—may put me in the unique position of not taking sides, but of being able to see the way forward constructively.

Although welcome, the local government changes must above all be seen to be fair across the country. The Secretary of State proposes that the local government commission should go to certain areas first and that those areas should gather some confidence and momentum, which is not only sensible, but will be welcome. When the Secretary of State appoints the other members of the local government commission, it would be wise for him to consider some cross-party recognition of the role of the parties in local government and the role of people outside politics who could bring their expertise to bear. In that way, some confidence could exist even before the commission arrives in a particular area.

It was also wise for the commission to be called a "local government commission" and for the Government to abolish the Boundary Commission at the beginning. The only clear point from the 1974 organisation was that it was false, as the hon. Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) suggested, to begin with the idea of having a map and drawing boundaries. Nothing could be more preposterous. We should look at the local community, decide on the services that need to be delivered and then find areas that will enable those services to be delivered properly and responsively.

Part II also refers to the Audit Commission and to the need for "economy, efficiency and effectiveness". I hope that we shall also identify as a separate aim the point that we should be concerned about the delivery of quality in local services. It is all very well to consider the price, but it is even more important to discover what the quality of a given service is in a particular area.

The point made by the Secretary of State about comparisons of one authority with another were not helpful. We must study each local authority and decide what the challenges are for the councillors, of whichever party, in delivering a particular service in their authority. In one area, there may be many children who have English as a second language, so clearly the cost of delivering education there will be far greater than the cost of delivering education in another authority where there are few pupils who have English as a second language. If that factor is not taken into account and if we take into account only global spending allied to the number of schoolchildren in a local authority, we could come to some very false conclusions.

The same point applies to the collection of refuse, to which other hon. Members have referred. In my 12 years on Lewes district council, I received massive correspondence and many complaints about local services, but not once did I receive a complaint about local refuse services.

[Mr. David Bellotti]

Other hon. Members have said that they did not receive complaints about local refuse services while they served in local government. In other areas, hon. Members will have received a massive number of complaints. The only conclusion to be drawn is that each local authority will be different and that we must examine the nature of each one before making comparisons.

Mr. Wilshire: I, too, spent 11 years on a district council and I also had almost no complaints about the quality of the refuse service. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not only cost but quality that matters, even if there are no complaints? Surely he understands that there can be a huge waste of money which the public do not easily see and so do not complain about. My own local authority never had complaints about quality, but when tendering was introduced, massive savings were introduced although the quality stayed marvellously high.

Mr. Bellotti: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point, although it is not sufficiently all-embracing. There is a question of cost and a question of quality. The two factors put together produce the service that local people deserve. In the local authorities on which I served, we were extremely mindful of the cost of delivering the services, but not to the exclusion of the quality of service delivered. Anyone can deliver a service of sorts very cheaply, but to deliver a service of the necessary quality is an extra challenge to the hon. Gentleman's point.

As we look towards the implementation of the proposals, it is important for us to bear in mind the question of timing. I and my party were concerned that the first information on the local government commission seemed to suggest that the implementation could take a long time. I encourage the Secretary of State to consider the point that a shorter period for implementation would be desirable, because the implementation period may otherwise lead to considerable difficulties. Senior staff in local authorities will see new posts being advertised in other authorities and may, quite properly, apply for them, leaving some local authorities in a void because they do not know whether their life will be continued. A shorter period should be the aim of the Secretary of State.

Another question is the continuity of services during the transition period. It is important that local authorities do not pass responsibility to new authorities which then do not take on those services with the continuity that is needed. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) mentioned joint authorities. I assume that the Secretary of State was by and large saying in the Bill that such authorities would be the exception rather than the rule. It would be helpful if the Secretary of State could confirm that tonight, because there is a great fear about joint authorities. There is no real problem about police authorities, which have been mentioned, because there are many joint authorities for the police already.

There is no need for joint authorities for service delivery in education and in social services. They are not necessary and it would be helpful if the Secretary of State would confirm that they will not be the normal mode of delivery for education and social services. They could be undemocratic and unaccountable, and they could become very bureaucratic.

If a county council finds that it is to be abolished, what will happen to structure planning? That is probably the only function of the existing county councils which deserves some more detailed thought and we may have an opportunity to explore that point in Committee. The Secretary of State has an opportunity between now and then to consider whether structure planning might be an ideal function of a regional tier of government. Structure planning, involving ports, airports, motorways, the countryside, areas of outstanding natural beauty and especially our national parks, would be important if dealt with at regional level. If we had regional government, the case for a government for London should be made at that time.

As a former chair of education in East Sussex—the hon. Member for Reading, West referred to education—I know that it is alarming for a councillor to have to consider visiting 240 primary schools, 39 secondary schools and six colleges. I find it hard to believe that any councillor could keep in touch with such a large section of service delivery. During my time of service, I visited about one quarter of those establishments and the knowledge that I gained was useful but certainly not sufficient for me to oversee such a responsibility.

The right hon. Member for Halton, referring to a brief from the Association of County Councils, spoke of the need to have joint committees if education authorities were smaller. That seems unnecessary and inappropriate. I should have thought that a population base of about 60,000 plus was more than enough for a tier education authority, because the main point is to have a post-16 option in each area. The Government's proposals for colleges—some of which we welcome—make it less likely that a tier of 60,000 could not work. I am sure that it could. The Secretary of State should make it fairly clear that that could be an option if the local government commission arrived at that conclusion and if it was supported by local people. That would do a great deal to reassure people that they would not be put into very large structures.

The Association of District Councils, under the former chairman, Mr. Thomason, and the Association of County Councils, presently chaired by Mr. John Chatfield, have not been extremely helpful to our debates as they have obviously lobbied from vested interests. Having served on both district and county councils, I understand their thinking, but I call on both those associations to put their vested interests to one side during this process. We want to achieve the best structure that we can. I have no doubt that in East Sussex, for which I speak, people living in Brighton, Eastbourne and Hastings would love the opportunity to put forward proposals for unitary authorities for those districts. I have confidence that they would succeed in doing so if permitted.

I invite the Secretary of State to come to East Sussex in the near future; I am sure that both he and representatives of the local government commission would receive a warm welcome. I also ask the Secretary of State to consider inviting representatives of the local government commission to go to the Isle of Wight soon. I understand that all the political parties and virtually everyone on the Isle of Wight would like one tier of local government on the island. There is currently one county council and two district councils, so the island would make an ideal starting point for the local government commission, which would receive great support.

The Secretary of State said that he—I am paraphrasing—deprecated organisations that spend substantial amounts of charge payers' money on public relations campaigns to preserve themselves. I was pleased to hear that and am sure that he will join me in condemning East Sussex county council for unnecessarily spending £6,000 to join a consortium of county councils in the south-east of England with the sole aim of putting forward proposals to keep the county councils of Kent, Surrey, East Sussex, West Sussex, Hampshire and others. Oddly enough, the consortium did not invite the Isle of Wight to join it—the only county council in that region not controlled by the Conservatives. That gross misuse of charge payers' money deserves investigation and I hope that the Secretary of State will consider commissioning one.

I also hope that the Secretary of State will join me in confirming to communities across England that he has no intention of forcing anyone into a local identity in the form of local government if they do not want it. Clearly, we must decide how to proceed if communities cannot agree, but the present structure of boroughs and districts forms a possible way forward.

If a district or borough wishes to join with another, the proposals must include that as an option. It is an essential principle—one in which I hope the Secretary of State believes—that if parts of districts and boroughs wish to stay as they are, they should not be moved against their will. I have previously raised that matter with the Secretary of State. Although I believe firmly in that principle, it is of no help to me in my constituency when the local Conservative party distributes newsletters claiming that I believe the exact opposite. I now have an opportunity to place on record yet again that I do not believe that parishes and communities should be placed within structures of local government against their will. I believe that the Secretary of State shares my view and confirmation on that would be extremely helpful.

Mr. Martlew: Is the hon. Gentleman advocating local referendums to decide the boundaries of boroughs?

Mr. Bellotti: In the small number of cases where there is a clear division of opinion, a local referendum would be extremely helpful as it would be one way to make absolutely sure that the community backed the proposals. I support the idea of local referendums where appropriate. Where the bulk of the local community agrees on what they would like—I believe that there is consensus in Reading, Southend, Bristol, Brighton and Eastbourne—progress could be made without the need for referendums.

The plans to change the structure of local government desperately need all-party consensus if they are to be implemented. I hope that my comments will encourage the Government, because the future of the services that local people so rightly need and desperately want are far too important for us to play party politics with them.

Part I of the Bill refers to the citizens charter. I think that everyone will support—Labour party spokesmen have already done so today—the publication of information on the performance of local authorities. I hope that when we publish league tables and information we shall ensure that true comparisons are made. I also hope that we shall develop that proposal and give people meaningful information. Most of the work that the Audit Commission has produced is really only intelligible to those who understand local government. Many people will not necessarily understand many of the Audit Commission's reports and much of the information sent to local government. In Committee the Government might address the issue of how to communicate to local people the level of services delivered, which is much more important than the cost, and whether the services are working.

I welcome the emphasis that the Government place on parish councils. If there were unitary authorities across England, with active parish and community councils, that would be almost ideal. Active parish councils at grassroots level could bring forward proposals and run some of the services. I do not see why they should not be in charge of some of the leisure and recreational services as well as the village halls and community centres that so many of them have pump primed and some of them run. That proposal would also provide a much more active understanding of how a unitary tier would work.

It is important that we encourage competitive tendering in local government, but if we make it compulsory we shall be going one step too far. There are many examples where compulsory competitive tendering has resulted in higher costs than those formerly charged by direct labour organisations. The report from Strathclyde clearly shows that a range of services provided through compulsory competitive tendering arrangements does not meet the necessary quality levels.

The Bill provides an opportunity to help local government serve the community in the years ahead. I hope that we shall be able to achieve consensus. The Bill has many factors which the Liberal Democrats, from their experience in local government, want to change. However, the local government commission is so important that I hope that if the Government are prepared to compromise, other parties will put their differences to one side. Ultimately, local communities and the services that they deliver are the most important aspects to consider.

6.38 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): The verdict of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) seems to be that the Bill is good in parts. We should be grateful for small mercies and the modest approbation given to the Bill. The hon. Gentleman mentioned East Sussex county council, and I gained the impression that the town of Eastbourne was casting hungry eyes at the possibility of the takeover or demise of the county leading to the town moving into a larger single unitary authority.

I wish to carry forward the theme of the place of counties in the future structure, but to move from the scale of an ant—East Sussex county council—to the size of an elephant—my own county of north Yorkshire which is, I believe, the largest in the country. I shall consider the future of north Yorkshire against the background of two important guidelines that I believe have been placed before the House. The first is the Government's indication in their draft guidance to the local government commission that they wish local government in principle—and as a preferred option—to move in the direction of unitary authorities broadly as the norm. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier that "no change" would be an appropriate solution or option in certain areas and in certain circumstances.

I want to make some observations about the implications of those two distinctive guidelines for my

[Mr. Michael Alison]

shire county of north Yorkshire. First—and I mention this only to dismiss it and eliminate it as a serious option—there is no case, in my view, for turning the existing North Yorkshire county council into the single unitary authority for the huge geographical area which constitutes north Yorkshire. That is an area of more than 830,000 hectares which extends virtually from the outskirts of Leeds in the south to virtually the outskirts of Darlington and Teesside some 80 or 90 miles up the Great North road in the north. It stretches from the western Pennines on one side to the North sea on the east. That is too big an area for a single county authority to become the unitary authority for the area.

In its public statements, North Yorkshire county council gives a nod in the direction of the proposition that it should become the unitary authority for that huge county. However, it does that I believe only as the ultimate fallback alternative to the possibility of its total demise as an authority.

I want to put before my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities the proposition that the north Yorkshire county area might be one of the areas where no change—or at least no absolute change—might be the proper option for the local government commission to consider. I advocate that option because if the county area of north Yorkshire is too big for a single unitary authority, its very size paradoxically involves the deployment of certain services, above all, police, fire, highways and coastal protection and also perhaps some strategic planning functions, which must be organised in an integrated and cohesive fashion if they are to be efficiently organised and deployed over an extended area. For those reasons, they are probably best deployed under a single eye from a single vantage point or base.

Those services could be administered by a consortium of smaller unitary authorities, based on the existing districts, under the so-called joint arrangement or agency facilities. However, if such agency or joint arrangement provisions are to be necessary for certain services in north Yorkshire, a strong case can be made for the retention of North Yorkshire county council precisely for the oversight of the long-distance and strategic services to which I have referred.

I do not believe that the case for retaining North Yorkshire county council rests only or principally on the argument for retaining the education and social service functions at Northallerton. I am agnostic as to where those services might be best located in future in north Yorkshire. They could be devolved to geographically smaller unitary authorities based upon the existing districts, such as Selby district council which is an efficient authority with a commendably human interface and local responsiveness.

I make that point about the potential for placing education and social services with the smaller districts if they were to become unitary authorities, simply because so much devolution and dispersion to local levels is nowadays inherent in the modern approach to running schools and to enhancing the local community dimensions of social services.

However, whether or not North Yorkshire county council should retain education and social services under a retained, two-tier structure, I must place on record the view that the very fact that one can argue cheerfully and with conviction that North Yorkshire county council should survive in some form into the new era is a powerful testimonial to the calibre of the elected representatives and to the outstanding quality of the local government officers who serve the public from Northallerton under the politically moderate but dedicated and conscientious leadership of John Clout, the leader of North Yorkshire county council.

John Clout leads a good and efficient team and its dissolution would be a loss for local government. I want to place on record how greatly indebted I am for the prompt, courteous and efficient responses that I receive regularly from the county chief executive, Mr. Leyland; the county surveyor, Mr. Moore; the county education officer, Mr. Evans; the county's director of social services, Mr. Ransford, and the other officers of the authority, to the many approaches that I have had to make to them on behalf of my constituents. It is the service which my constituents receive from the county council——

Sir Anthony Durant: My right hon. Friend deserves a lunch.

Mr. Alison: Indeed, a great many lunches would have to be deployed if all the satisfied customers were to be given lunch by the county council.

It is in response to the services that my constituents and I receive with such great efficiency from the county council in Northallerton that I advocate the "no absolute change" option which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned this afternoon and which my hon. Friend the Minister will understand. He has repeatedly been kind enough to receive representatives of the county council and discuss some of their peculiar difficulties, such as clearing snow and ice from the extensive roads in the county, and other problems facing the council, to which he has so courteously and helpfully responded after the deputations from my right hon. and hon. Friends and I with John Clout and others.

I hope that the "no absolute change" option will be considered seriously for north Yorkshire against the background of the earlier remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

6.47 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): This is proving to be a fascinating debate not only because of its subject, but because we have learnt a new adage from the Government Benches—I paraphrase: "My authority is wonderful, so please leave it intact because it is Tory-controlled, but look at all those wicked Labour authorities elsewhere with which we must deal." In some respects, it is depressing that such a vital part of democracy in a modern thriving country should be so derided and undervalued by Conservative Members.

I want to defend the principle of local government. The principles of local democracy and accountability should be enhanced. Our local authorities comprise officers, professionals and workers who, on the whole, are dedicated people. They are dedicated to the principle of local government. They include teachers, housing workers and social workers who try daily to deliver services that millions of people depend on.

It is a shame that some local authorities have been wrongly accused of self interest in the discussion of local

government reorganisation. Local authorities are attempting genuinely to participate in the debate on local government reorganisation. In Bristol, we have a two-tier authority. We have Bristol city council, which is for the district, and we have Avon county council. Reference was made to whether we would toast Lancaster. I suppose that we in Avon would toast a cosmetics company. I am not quite sure how people identify with the county. The county council has discussed the matter with all the district authorities that make up the county. They have jointly commissioned two universities to examine local government reorganisation and to consider how best to continue delivering the services that local people decide that they want from local government in action. It simply is not true that local authorities are motivated by self interest.

Conservative Members should not be surprised that we do not take seriously their commitment to consultation. We do not believe them when they tell us that they are committed to the principles of accountability and democracy. The reason is that they abolished a level of local authority. I did not see them consult anybody when they got rid of metropolitan authorities or the Greater London council. I do not remember extensive consultation on how fundamentally to change the method of local authority finance when they introduced the poll tax. Lo and behold, as we approach yet another pre-election period—it is difficult to know how many more there will be before election day—the Government claim to be interested in service delivery.

Local authorities in Bristol employ about 41,000 people. They deliver services to hundreds of thousands of people in the county of Avon. They approach with fear and trepidation the instability and insecurity of another chaotic, badly thought out reorganisation of local government. Such an environment is the hallmark of the Government's approach to local authorities. There will be chaos and destruction, not the enshrining of democracy and accountability. The Government, in restructuring local government, have missed an opportunity to provide certainty about the future of local government because of the way in which they have set up the reform process.

I wish to widen the debate to see whether we have a common view of local democracy and accountability. In the mid-1960s, the Labour Government set up a royal commission, under the chairmanship of Lord Redcliffe-Maud, to examine local government in England. The commission considered that local government was

"not to be seen merely as a provider of services."

It said:

"The importance"

and thereby the purpose

"of local government lies in the fact that it is the means by which people can provide services for themselves; can take an active and constructive part in the business of government; and can decide for themselves, within the limits of what national policies and local resources allow, what kind of services they want and what kind of environment they prefer."

That is exactly the principle that the Government are trying to avoid in setting up the commission for local government reform. The matter is to be finance-led, with all the simplistic answers and the lack of reality that are involved. The Government present artificial debates as though some hon. Members who would gaily burn £20 notes and waste local money rather than spend it on delivering the valued services that people desperately need.

More recently, Professor John Stewart has been exploring a new basis for local government which embraces the ideas of Redcliffe-Maud. Instead of the term "local government", he prefers to use the term "community government". Either way, we know what we mean—local democracy. He says:

"The concept of community government or local government is built on three crucial ideas—an enabling authority."

He describes that as one that adopts management structures and processes, that focuses both on community concerns and problems and also on the means of meeting those concerns and problems. This will involve direct service provision, but it will also require the ability to work with other agencies. As authorities adopt a wider role, they have to abandon the assumption that they are a self-sufficient authority—all-knowing, all-seeing, all-doing. That is what the Government assume. They think that they know what everybody thinks, what everybody wants, and exactly how they would want something done in the first place. We must move away from that attitude.

Professor Stewart describes new ways in which local authorities could work with the voluntary sector, with the private sector, and with joint ventures. That is part of our discussion. Professor Stewart talks about a responsible authority seeking to provide services not to the public but for the public, and with the public. That is a different concept of local democracy from the one that is advocated by Conservative Members. In plain language, a responsible authority tries to find out what people actually want and attempts to meet their needs.

Before we hear cries of derision from Conservative Members about current local authority practice, no one is advocating that everthing in local authorities is perfect. Councillors and officers know that, and they are struggling with limited resources, instability and insecurity to try to meet their objectives.

Mr. Wilshire: I know Professor Stewart well, and I have great respect for him. Does the hon. Lady accept that his point, and my point, that needs extend beyond local government services is a key to the issues that we are debating? People need their dustbins emptied, and they need grocery shops, doctors, schools, fire brigades and solicitors. Needs go much further than the argument that the hon. Lady is deploying. Sensible local government and the Conservative Government are concerned about the needs of all people, not just the services that local government provides.

Ms. Primarolo: I tried to indicate that local authorities should have power to co-operate beyond their boundaries and not assume that they are totally self-sufficient. I do not subscribe to the view that we should regard local authorities as public utilities from which people demand exactly what they want. What is missing from the debate that the Government have engendered is the idea that participation in a democracy also requires responsibilities in the provision of services. We are talking about much more than ringing up and demanding that our dustbins are emptied. The debate is about participating in the decisions that are made in the area in which one lives.

Better local government means improving access to services and learning from the public, which is something that Governments find difficult if not nigh on impossible sometimes. It means listening to people and communicating with them about both the services and the standards that they demand. It means extending choice and involving people in decision-making. It means working with people

[Ms. Primarolo]

to provide responsive services. If Conservative Members think that such things are not already happening in local authorities, then, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said about schools, I can say only that they cannot have paid much attention to or visited many local authorities. We need responsive authorities that are accountable to the communities that they represent.

We need to look at the very structure of local government and at why so many women are excluded from participating in it. We need to discover ways of devolving decision-making to ensure that more women can become representatives and locally elected councillors and get involved in the wider debate about local democracy.

Sir Anthony Durant: I have been listening closely to the hon. Lady and agree with much of what she has said, but she has not said whether she favours retaining Avon or wants to get rid of it. She said that "Avon calling" is the only toast that she can think of, so would she prefer Bristol to be the most important authority? I should be interested to know her view.

Ms. Primarolo: I have already said that I favour a unitary authority. I have been trying to say that, before we decide a structure, we must know what we expect that structure to do and how we expect it to meet the hopes and aspirations of the people whom it seeks to represent and who have expressed their views. However, none of that has been taken on board in the criteria that have been set for the commission. The crucial issue of fiscal control in a local authority also determines whether the services that that authority wants to deliver can be delivered.

I should like to demonstrate the sort of things that are happening now in local authorities. As a former councillor, I know that many local authorities have what are called "performance review committees". The Government seem to think that they are the only ones who think about performance and review, but Bristol city council has a core strategy for its performance review committee, which is a sub-committee of its policy and resources committee. It has called the objectives that it seeks to achieve the "six Es for good local government". They are economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, empowerment and environment. The council talks about making sure that the community has a representative voice to speak for Bristol and the interests of its people. It talks about encouraging and expanding democracy in Bristol by maximising participation in public life and extending community empowerment. Its objectives refer to accessibility, communication and research into identifying needs. It talks about how to maximise the use of council resources and about how to employ external resources in co-operation. It refers to providing high-quality services and facilities where resources are available. It strives to eliminate disadvantage, discrimination and deprivation. Bristol city council also talks about a corporate management style and about behaving as a model employer.

As we enter a period of local government reorganisation and review with the establishment of the commission, we should be laying down clearly exactly what we believe local government should be about. We must decide whether it should be simply an outpost of central Government, doing whatever it is told, or an integral and important part of local democracy.

Local government is about services. It should not be used as a basis for ad hoc competition—which is what the Government have sought—because that simply enhances and entrenches inequalities; it does not eradicate them. Local government should reflect local needs. It should be about ensuring that people control their lives.

It is interesting to note that the Government would not extend these proposals to British Gas, British Telecom, the electricity companies, the water industry, the Bank of England, the judiciary or even Government Departments. Imagine if they were subjected to the constraints now facing local councillors in terms of their financial duties and the Government's ability to surcharge them.

The Government are about destroying local government and local democracy and replacing it with pathetic charters that promise everything but guarantee nothing, while isolating people from power and ensuring that they cannot participate in the decisions that govern their lives.

We are facing a golden opportunity that should not be missed. The commission should be given a wider brief to state clearly what is meant by local democracy, how people can be encouraged to participate in it, and how local government can discharge its duties locally.

7.6 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I shall concentrate my brief remarks on part II. We are a conservative nation, with the word "conservative" spelt, I hope, with a capital "c," but certainly with a small "c": we do not like change. That is certainly true of people in the north-west where the local government changes of 1974 were, and to a large extent still are, resented by many people. The move from small urban authorities to large authorities was generally not welcomed. It was accepted only because the new authorities that were eventually established could have been even larger.

Hyndburn, for example, is made up of the former urban districts of Oswaldtwistle, Clayton-le-Moors, Rishton, Great Harwood, the parish council of Altham, and of Accrington non-county borough. Despite the fact that the people of those districts had much in common and that, with the exception of Great Harwood, they comprised a parliamentary constituency, there were many misgivings about the changes. It has taken 17 years of dedicated hard work, not least by the mayors of the new borough, to make Hyndburn acceptable to the majority of its residents. Even now, however, a sizeable minority still yearn for the pre-1974 days. The changes that are now being considered are, therefore, a matter of concern and interest to them.

In all their local government reforms, the Government have always placed much emphasis on accountability. I believe that accountability is greatest when the unit of local government is closest to the people and when people are represented by someone they know, someone whom they see around as they go about their daily lives, someone who lives among them and who knows the area. That is why I support the abolition of the county councils.

If asked, the majority of people would be unable to name their county councillors. They rarely see them and there is little coverage of their activities in the local press. Indeed, press coverage of the activities of the county councils, which account for 88 per cent. of local

government expenditure, is sparse. It could almost be said that the publicity that is given to district and to county council matters in the press is in inverse proportion to the amount of money that the two types of authority spend. Consequently, at county council elections, people do not vote according to the achievements or otherwise of that council but use the occasion to pass judgment on the Government of the day. If local government is to be accountable, it must be local.

When the latest proposals to change local government were announced, I was concerned that we might see an unseemly scrabble, with existing districts seeking to extend their boundaries, especially in east Lancashire, with Blackburn wanting to take over Hyndburn or at least part of it, and with Burnley looking covetously at Pendle. That has not happened. Existing districts throughout Lancashire have acted responsibly and have considered the options open to them seriously and in detail.

Along with the hon. Members for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Carr), and my hon. Friends the Members for Pendle (Mr. Lee) and for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), I recently met the leaders and chief executives of the six district councils of east Lancashire. They told us that all the 14 district councils of Lancashire were committed to becoming unitary authorities on their existing boundaries. I and my colleagues were happy to give our support to that case because we are acutely aware of the sense of community that the districts represent.

In my constituency of Hyndburn the council carried out a survey in which all electors were asked questions about what they wanted from local government in the future. The outcome was a ringing declaration of support for the council's case which, needless to say, has all-party support. Let me give some idea of how local people feel. When asked whether a single council providing all services would be more or less responsive to their needs, 60 per cent. said that it would be more responsive. When asked whether that single council should be at county or district level, 71 per cent. preferred the district. When asked whether the local authority should remain at its present size, 72 per cent. said yes and only 12 per cent. opted for a larger council.

The survey also consulted all companies in Hyndburn which employ 20 or more people. Of those, 84 per cent. wanted a unitary authority and 87 per cent. wanted the authority to be based on the district, not the county. In addition, a meeting of religious leaders of Christian denominations and the Muslim community from the whole constituency voted unanimously that Hyndburn was the right size for the unitary authority. I regard that as significant, because clearly those people had no political axe to grind.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities has emphasised that the aim of the Bill is to ensure that the new structure of local government reflects the identities and interests of local communities. As a life-long resident of east Lancashire, I know how strong are the ties that bind local people together. We are fiercely proud of our history, our civic traditions and the contribution that we have made to the nation's well-being, first through the cotton industry and, more recently, through the multitude of new businesses that have grown up since cotton's demise.

I am pleased that the Government have made it clear that any change must be worthwhile and must not be made merely for the sake of it. I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State say today that local opinions would be listened to, for it would be disastrous if the Government and the commission thought that they could draw neat circles on the map and lump two or three existing districts together for administrative convenience. Lancashire people are not prepared to be pawns in someone else's game. Only they know what is good for them. The poll that I quoted showed clearly what the majority of people want. They want to be rid of a high-spending county council, and they want unitary authorities based on existing districts.

7.12 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): It saddens me to have to speak in the debate. We are discussing the Bill because the Government got it wrong again on local government. They did so on the poll tax and quickly changed their minds. On this matter, it has taken them 20 years to change their minds. The trouble is that they have not told us what they want to do. They have told us that they got it wrong in 1972, but not what we can have. We could have unitary authorities based on the district or the county, or a two-tier system. One could have any one of three there. It does not make any sense.

In response to my intervention, the Secretary of State blamed the Labour Government of 1974 to 1979 for not changing the structure. What a cheek! What would have happened if, in 1974, soon after the reorganisation, we had reorganised again? We had to let the system settle down. We had to suck it and see. By the end of the term of office of the Labour Government, we had decided that the system needed to be changed. Then the Conservative Government came to power and did nothing about it. They left us for almost two decades with a mess.

I feel sorry for councillors of all political persuasions, who have been struggling on since 1974 with a system that does not work. It was introduced by the Conservatives, despite Labour Members telling the Government that it would not work. Since I entered the House in 1977 I have been shocked at the way in which the Conservatives denigrate local councillors. It is an absolute disgrace. Often they denigrate councillors of their own political persuasion. There is an arrogance about the Conservatives. They think that they know what is right and what will happen. I suspect that if we read the fine print of the Bill we would find somewhere a provision to enable the Secretary of State for the Environment to appoint the mayor of Carlisle. That is how extreme the Conservatives are in destroying local democracy. They do not give a fig about what councillors think.

It is important for a political party to control the local council which can stand up to the national Government. We need checks and balances. If the Conservatives are in power, the only way to check their abuse of power is to have Labour councils. That is why the Conservatives have tried to shackle Labour councils over the years.

There is some anxiety that we do not know when the local government reorganisation will happen. Will the commission start in Cornwall and work up to Cumbria, or start in Cumbria and work down to the Isle of Wight and Southend? We are not told. We are told that the reorganisation will not be uniform and will not take place on one date, such as 1 April 1994. It is a timetable for chaos.

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

The Government's proposals will be a fiasco if the Government have the opportunity to implement them. At any one time some councils will be getting ready to change, others will already have changed and others will not know what is to happen to them. How will it be possible to appoint officers to those councils? Will the best officers settle for an authority of which the structure is already settled? Will they wait in an area which may no longer exist? How will it be possible to hold local elections in such areas? We need annual elections, but will councillors wait about to see whether their authority will be dissolved? It will not work.

Many Conservative Members have spoken about their experience in local government, so I suppose that I might also parade my campaign medals. I served on a county borough for two years before it was abolished. I served until 1988 on a county council and for two years had the pleasure to be the chairman of that council. My right hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes)—his constituency is basically Widnes, with bits added on—said that people born in Cumbria were proud to be called Cumbrians. That is all right if one comes from Cumberland, but not if one comes from Westmorland or the furthest parts of Lancashire. Down there we are still proud to be called Lancastrians. It would be nonsensical to give any serious thought to unitary authorities based on counties the size of Cumbria.

We have heard a great deal about whether education or social services could be administered by district authorities. It would depend on the size of the authority. No one has suggested for one moment that housing could be run by a county council. We all see housing as a service which must be near the people. That would be difficult to achieve in a large county council.

The Government appear to be giving the nod to unitary authorities. I said that it would be a fiasco if all the councils did not change on a certain date. I hope that if the Government look to unitary authorities to set the lead they will consider the historic cities which have perhaps 800 years history of looking after themselves and controlling the way in which they develop. In two decades that tradition and that expertise have not been lost. I am sure that the councils of the historic cities could very quickly become all-purpose authorities. I come from the historic city of Carlisle, which has had a royal charter for 800 years. I hope that if it is decided to go for unitary authorities in my area that fact will be taken into account.

Here again, we are talking about compulsory competitive tendering. This is an aspect of the Bill that concerns me deeply. In my maiden speech in the House in 1987 I said that one would find it easy to save money if one were to cut wages and holiday entitlement, get rid of entitlement to sick pay and do away with pension provision. That is not a measure of efficiency, although perhaps it is a measure of meanness which will be easily recognised by Conservative Members, who do not care what price the workers have to pay so long as the poll tax payers or ratepayers—or whatever they are—have to pay less. It is not difficult to have that kind of efficiency in services if one is prepared to create a pool of unemployed people willing to take jobs at any wage better than the dole that the current Government provide. That is what this is all about. It is not about efficiency; it is about cutting costs.

That is one of the reasons for the Conservatives' strong objection to our plan for a minimum wage. If the minimum wage were set at £3·40 an hour many of the cowboys who are running the services would have to increase the wages that they pay. Thus they would not be able to compete with local authorities and would go out of business. Of course, in many areas that will not happen as the local government structure has been destroyed. In many areas it would be impossible for refuse collection to be carried out by local authorities because all the wagons have been sold off. People will end up paying more to private contractors when those contractors get away with paying low wages.

Under other provisions of the Bill the same thing will be done to white-collar services. I do not understand. No one would run a private business like this. No one would suggest that the personnel function of a multinational company should be tampered with to the extent of 25 per cent., as is proposed in the Bill. *[Interruption.]* On that point I am prepared to give way to any hon. Member.

Mr. Wilshire: Surely the hon. Gentleman has heard of consultants. Firms, large and small, the length and breadth of this country and of every other country bring in experts to deal with specific matters.

Mr. Martlew: If the hon. Gentleman is talking about the personnel function let me tell him that I used to be the personnel manager of the largest boot company in the world. I can assure him that that company was very efficient and that it did not farm out its personnel function to private contractors. It knew that if it were to do so it would not get as good a service and that the cost would be twice as high.

Now there is talk of CCT in legal and financial services. Has any hon. Member ever spent a morning talking to a solicitor or an accountant? Any who has will know that a month later, when the bill arrives, it looks as if the discussion lasted a fortnight. The provision of services in this way is by no means cheaper. One could spend the equivalent of a year's poll tax in a morning's consultation with a solicitor.

Mr. Dalyell: Last week I spent a morning with Mr. Alex Linkston and Mr. John Spraggon, who are senior officials of West Lothian district council, and with Councillors Graeme Morrice, Jimmy McGinley and Jim Clark. We were dealing partly with precisely the enormously difficult issue of legal services. The people to whom I spoke are concerned about the fact that low tenders received from firms paying lower-than-minimum wages would be absolutely false in the event of the introduction of a minimum wage or a decent wage. This is exactly the point that my hon. Friend is making.

Mr. Wilshire *rose*——

Mr. Martlew: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Later perhaps, but we do not have intervention upon intervention.

Mr. Martlew: Let me return to the main theme. Privatisation of this kind will not result in a saving of money. We know that professionals such as architects, lawyers and accountants are probably the most expensive people in the world to employ by the hour. Any councillor who has ever been involved in a dispute about a legal

ruling will know that the chief executive says that it may be necessary to get an opinion from Queen's counsel and that, in that event, the council has to consider whether a supplementary estimate is necessary to pay the QC's bill. Once the professional essence of local government has been destroyed it will not be recoverable, and the councils will be ripped off by the private sector.

All this is nonsensical. The Secretary of State, referring to our objections to compulsory tendering, said that what we were in favour of amounted to jobs for the boys. If I have ever seen anything that amounts to jobs for the boys this is it. It is jobs for the boys in the Law Society and the Rotary club, and my constituents and their constituents will pay. It has nothing to do with efficiency, but everything to do with the fact that the Conservative Government do not understand local government and, therefore, fear it. The Conservatives are not fit to pass any laws on local government, as is evident to anybody who looks at their record. Let us consider the poll tax, of which the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, who is on the Government Front Bench at present, was a great advocate. That is not mentioned these days, but it is a fact. The right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker), who piloted the Local Government Act 1972 through the House, should have had the decency to come here today to hear his own side denigrate that Act. Conservative Members do not understand it, are afraid of it and will try to destroy it.

This Bill has nothing to do with improvement. It will only create confusion and low morale in local government. Having talked to many local government people at the weekend, I know that morale has never been lower. The Government are creating uncertainty. There will be many early retirements, as there were the last time. It will cost the councils a fortune. In addition, the former officers will reappear as consultants earning twice as much as they did previously. Let us vote against the Bill because it fails to provide for democratic local government to take us into the 21st century.

7.27 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the introduction of this Bill. I welcome very much the citizens charter and the financial accountability measures contained in part I.

Like several other hon. Members, I want to address my remarks to part II—in particular, clauses 13 and 14, which establish the local government commission and give it power to recommend single-tier authorities in place of the two-tier authorities, having had regard, as is specified in clause 13(5),

"to the identities and interests of local communities".

The intention is to secure effective and convenient local government, rather than, as the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) tried to argue, to destroy local government.

The Bill makes one thing very clear indeed: there is absolutely no intention to indicate a preference for districts over counties or for counties over districts. It seems to me that that is fundamental to the content of the Bill, and people who seek to read some political point into it are barking up the wrong tree.

My right hon. Friend, in his opening remarks, and my noble Friend the Baroness Blatch, in her speech in another place, made it clear that there was a presumption in favour of unitary authorities but that in those places where the arguments appeared to favour the continuation of two authorities that was a perfectly satisfactory solution. In other words, the proposal being put forward by my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison)—that in some circumstances there would be no change—is a positive and acceptable decision. I very much support that approach.

The proposals before the House are of particular relevance to a certain group of local authorities. I refer to those cities which formed the historic cities group following the consultative document on the structure of local government published in April 1991. The participating cities are Cambridge, Canterbury, Carlisle—we have heard from the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)—Chester, Exeter, Lincoln, Norwich, Oxford, Worcester, York and the great city that I have the honour to represent, Gloucester. Hon. Members will notice that those cities display a cross-party political complexion and that the hon. Members representing those cities show some variations in their enthusiasm for the Bill's proposals, although, having spoken to all of them, I have gauged that there is broadly a majority in favour of the Bill.

The councils running those authorities have chosen to join the historic cities group because they see much greater opportunity for securing an effective and convenient local government with unitary status than without it. That is the aim of the Bill. Therefore, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) said, it is surprising that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) expressed himself so firmly against the proposals for unitary status. As has been said, he will find that a number of councillors representing the Labour party do not agree with his views.

All those historic cities, with the possible exception of one, had county borough status up to 1974, so they have had extensive experience of running their own affairs. As long ago as 1483, my city of Gloucester received a charter to run its own affairs, and it continued to do so successfully until 1974.

Many other cities may equally make out a strong case for unitary status but were not county boroughs before 1974 and nobody is suggesting that county borough status should be a necessary qualification for a city to achieve unitary status now. It is only that the existence of previous county borough status is likely to result in the criteria that the local government commission will be looking at being more readily, easily and obviously satisfied.

The local government commission will be called upon to consider the identities and interests of local communities—what I would describe as civic and community loyalties. In other words, it will find out to where and to what group the residents living in that area look. It is, dare I say it, the local government equivalent of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) once described—thereby attracting a great deal of criticism—as the cricket test. Where do loyalties lie? If people live and work and have the centre of their lives in a great historic city such as Gloucester, they are more likely to feel that that city will represent, and protect where necessary, their interests. However well meaning and diligent a councillor living in a rural hinterland may be, he cannot hope to understand the wishes of people who live in the city as well as they do themselves. He has chosen to live in the countryside, and that is what he knows about.

[Mr. Douglas French]

Historic cities have an intensely and characteristically strong community identity. They are an integral and highly important part of the country's national heritage, with civic traditions stretching back many years. Local people look to the city for local identity and community loyalty. Therefore, it is logical and appropriate that the city to which they look should be responsible for delivering the services that affect their lives.

One factor that welds together their loyalty is historic tradition. When the Bill was debated in the other place, my predecessor, the Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes, argued that historic tradition should be taken into account by the local government commission when it assessed the suitability of an area and of an authority for unitary status. I entirely agree with that argument. Historical tradition means awareness of, adherence to and respect for the long-established customs and practices of a community.

When the local government commission considers the identities and interests of local communities, it could scarcely ignore the historical tradition altogether, but precisely because some candidate authorities will not have any historical tradition worth mentioning, I should like to see the words "historical tradition" included in the Bill as one of the factors that it should take into account. It is very important that the commission fully appreciates the extent to which historical tradition is an ingredient in community identity in these cities.

I was pleased to see that this theme was acknowledged by the Government in the debate in the other place and is likely to figure prominently in the guidance given to the commission. The draft guidelines published in November refer to taking into account the history of an area. That is a step in the right direction, although the history of an area is not quite the same as its historical tradition.

In my authority, there are many examples of problems caused by division of responsibilities between the city of Gloucester and the county council of Gloucestershire. Despite all the efforts of the county council and those who work for it, who I am sure do their best, they are cast in an impossible role.

Let me give some examples. There has recently been a dispute over the planning permission for a major new building—a magistrates court—to be located in the centre of Gloucester. This received planning approval by the county despite the fact that the plans had been condemned by the Royal Fine Art Commission, English Heritage and Gloucester Civic Trust as unsuitable. The popular view in the city was that the proposed building was inappropriate for the site for which it was planned, which abutted the narrow streets of a mediaeval planned city. However, this factor did not sway the planning authorities on the county council and as a result that application is to go to a public inquiry.

Another example is social services. Three years ago, there was a particularly tragic case in Gloucester of a deaf-blind adult, Beverley Lewis, who was found dead in circumstances of neglect. There was a strong feeling within the city that the social services department of the county had been predominantly oriented towards a rural, affluent country area, and had not been sufficiently tuned in to the far different difficulties of a close urban environment.

Another example is education. Over many years, there has been widespread dissatisfaction with the county education authority, which has not always promoted the best interests of the city schools. Such schools should be administered by people who know and feel for them rather than by people who are remote from them.

Yet another example is the highly dubious roads and traffic planning situation. Here again, the interests of the city and the county do not always come together in a convenient and sensible way. Nor does the existence of two authorities make the preservation of heritage any easier, and the preservation of heritage is of prime importance in any historic city.

In about the past 12 months Gloucester has won four national awards, including those for the best tourist destination and the best practice for regeneration. The best practice award was given to the Gloucester docks development scheme, which is now attracting over 1 million visitors a year. This achievement, which is very much to the credit of the city council, was not made any easier by the overlapping responsibilities of the city and the county. In some instances there was a duplication of responsibilities involving the management and provision of tourist attractions. There were complications over museums, libraries and historic buildings, and the services that go with them. Unitary status would avoid that type of problem.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman is giving examples of the various services that could be carried out by a unitary authority. Education and social services are reasonably straightforward, but he referred to planning. How does he see unitary and strategic planning procedures being carried out under the present proposals?

Mr. French: My example was of a building which was to be erected within the city of Gloucester, not in the county. It was to be used largely by those living in the city. It was to be seen every day by those people. Yet it was proposed that it be built to a design which was widely regarded as unacceptable to the people in the city. I am endeavouring to argue that decisions that so closely affect one community should not be significantly determined by those who live somewhere else.

When it comes to planning there has, of course, to be consideration of factors that are part of the wider strategic plan. That consideration applies especially to transport and roads. There has to be a broader plan and broader decision-making on the zoning of certain areas. The establishment of a unitary authority does not mean that that authority will consider factors that relate only and specifically to the geographical area over which it has control. Any unitary authority will have to bear in mind also the broader strategic balance. I see no difficulty in that.

Mr. O'Brien: The Bill does not bring clarity to any of the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman, especially that of strategic planning. It does not tell us where functions will lie. If he agrees that there is a need for that identification, will he press the Secretary of State to ensure that it is included in the Bill?

Mr. French: The Bill will establish a local government commission, which will be provided with guidelines to determine the work that it does. Within those guidelines several factors have to be taken into account. If the commission follows the guidelines as set out—no doubt

they will be refined, but we have a draft set—it seems to be highly likely that it will need to take into account the very point which the hon. Gentleman is making.

I shall complete the examples that I was giving earlier. There is confusion over local taxation as a result of the presence of two authorities. Perhaps the prime example is the community charge. Although the city council had the responsibility of collecting the charge, the county was to spend the overwhelming majority of the moneys. It was not clear to the residents of the city where their money was going. Nor was it clear, unless they examined the small print on their bills and the accompanying literature, how the money was spent. That clouds accountability between county and district.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) said, people do not know who does what. I say that people do not know who spends what or who receives what from funds raised locally.

Why is the situation now different from how it was viewed in 1974? There is a difference for the fundamental reason that has been mentioned earlier, which is that local authorities now are much more enabling authorities than they were before. It is not necessary now for local authorities to be responsible for providing every service themselves.

Notwithstanding the argument that has taken place during the debate over the cost of consultants, the fact remains that it is now possible to deliver virtually every service that a resident within a certain area requires even when the population of the area is extremely small. As the role of an enabling authority is now understood and is being practised, the size of the authority, even if it is a small one, does not stand in the way of it achieving unitary status. There will be—I expect this to happen—some examples where unitary status in respect of certain services is not regarded as practical. In that event, joint arrangements can be organised with a lead authority.

The second difference between now and 1974—this is apart from the growth in understanding of the enabling role—is that cities have generally become much more involved in a wider range of local issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) said, they are meeting the needs of people and not merely providing services. This is clear in Gloucester, where the local authority plays a part in economic development, tourism, leisure, pedestrianisation plans and conservation. It is now involved in many areas with which it would not have been concerned previously. It is artificial, highly bureaucratic and impossible to try to separate some of the responsibilities and functions that cities perform well from those which they are not allowed to perform at all without having first consulted the county council and obtained its agreement. Responsibilities and functions should be brought together.

Where unitary status is ultimately decided upon, I believe that local government will be more efficient, more effective and more economical and that there will be less duplication, confusion and delay and an end to divided responsibilities that lead to buck passing. Successful democracy requires accountability, which the Bill seeks to strengthen, and that requires people to know where responsibility lies. There must be clear and simple lines of communication and decision making. I think that the Bill and the proposed commission will deliver that, and the sooner the better.

One or two aspects of the commission's work worry me. It will examine which structure is best for which area. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West asked towards the beginning of the debate, "What constitutes an area?" When my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities replies, I hope that we shall hear more about the definition as he understands it.

My second reservation about the commission is that it will have a rolling geographical programme. That suggests a rather leisurely timetable. If the commission's work is allowed to spread over too long a period, it is highly likely to get bogged down and to run into unwelcome difficulties.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West suggested that the commission might start its work by considering areas of dissatisfaction, and he cited his constituency as one. That is one possible approach, but I suggest another for consideration: the commission should start its work by considering areas that have common characteristics. I suggest that the historic cities are much at the forefront of that category. They have a powerful case, which I think deserves to be heard early in the proceedings. I believe that the commission should consider the most obvious cases first.

The commission will need to be firm and efficient in the way in which it conducts its work if the ensuing debate is not to become an unseemly squabble between counties and districts. That must be avoided, or the result will not benefit individual residents—whom this Bill is designed to help—and it will discredit not only central but local government. Local residents would be disadvantaged.

The way that the commission conducts itself, the method of operation and the planning of its work are vital to the success of the Bill. I hope that very careful consideration will be given to that.

7.50 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The basic lacuna, and a source of great personal sadness for me, is that I never served in local government. I am the first speaker tonight from this side of the House who has not done so. Those who have not served in local government are, in a sense, incomplete in their political education. Therefore, in my almost 30 years in the House this is my maiden speech on local government matters. My reason for speaking is that West Lothian district council is concerned about the Bill. I have a very good relationship with the council. I met senior councillors and officials and listened to what they had to say, and I found their case compelling.

I have given notice to the Scottish Office that I wish to ask the following questions. First, will the Minister confirm that the Government are looking positively and constructively at the de minimis provision being increased from the current £100,000 to £250,000, as mentioned in the debate on 17 December 1991? From the information provided to me, it is clearly counterproductive in terms of value for money to go through the tender procedure for small contracts.

Secondly, in the event of an authority losing a contract resulting in the abolition of the in-house facility, will the Minister confirm that should that authority not be able to obtain satisfactory competitive prices second time around, additional resources will be made available either to fund the higher costs or to re-establish the in-house provision?

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

Thirdly, West Lothian has a clear policy of providing quality, customer-driven services to its community. In the event of the authority having misgivings about the capability of the lowest tenderer to maintain a quality service, what remedies are available to it at tender evaluation?

Fourthly, the cost of a performance bond is a real cost to a local authority and is necessary to safeguard customer interests. The Government's proposal to deduct the cost of that from the private contractor bid at tender evaluation is illogical in terms of value for money. Will the Minister reconsider that aspect?

Fifthly, what proposals do the Government have regarding the way in which future work will be packaged? In the provision of quality services, it is essential that work is packaged in a way that facilitates value for money and customer satisfaction, and is not artificially packaged to facilitate commercial considerations.

All those points were raised 10 days ago with the Scottish Minister—the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton)—and I today confirmed that I would raise them again in this debate.

I wish to make two other points. The first is the timing of the stages in tendering exercises. West Lothian is a responsible authority and I have worked in harmony with it for 30 years. The timetable proposed would take between eight and 10 months from the date of the initial advertisement to the start of the contract. That would be inappropriate for certain contracts—for example, building works—and there is an argument for setting a de minimis level for such an extended time schedule. For many elements of professional work, speed is of the essence and flexibility for short time scales must be permitted.

The period from announcement to the start of the contract is crucial and it should be kept to the absolute minimum. Otherwise, the council feels that if in-house bids are unsuccessful there will be little motivation to perform well, and the result would be detrimental to the community. Will there be a change to the current tender timetable? If so, the time scale should be restricted to one or two months respectively.

I wish to revert to my comments on the performance bond. The cost of the bond is a real cost to the private contractor, and one that will have to be paid by the client if the contract is awarded externally. The Government's proposal to deduct the cost of the bond from the private contractor's bid would artificially reduce it and could have the effect of the client paying more for the work because of that notional adjustment. That does not equate with the need to obtain best value for money and it should be strongly resisted.

I would not have dared to participate in this debate were I not absolutely convinced that it is an argument about value for money. Mr. Linkston, the chief executive of West Lothian, and his colleagues persuaded me that some of the proposals are, in effect—at least, for smaller authorities—against a decent value-for-money concept.

The case against compulsory competitive tendering must be strongly put. It is against local democracy. Councils will be denied the right to decide how best to organise and procure professional services. Value for money is not determined by cost alone. Commercial organisations, such as that referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), recognise that. I am a member of the all-party retail trade group and we visit large organisations such as Sainsbury and Safeway. They recognise that value for money is not determined by cost alone and they do not appoint on the basis of lowest cost.

Professional fees are a small percentage of total project costs, and savings in that area can be quickly eclipsed by poor design and inadequate consideration. First cost will predominate; no recognition will be made of the life cycle cost. Surely any prudent authority must be concerned with life cycle cost. Councillor Graeme Morrice argued at considerable length, and with great persuasiveness, that life cycle costs are all important.

Quality and lowest cost are incompatible. No other country in Europe selects contractors on that basis, so why should we apply that criterion to consultants? The professional institutions—for example, the Royal Institute of British Architects—whose members arguably have most to gain by an increased workload, have firmly and publicly declared against competition. There will be lack of continuity, discontinuity of service delivery and irreversible loss of valuable skills and resources. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle, with his great experience as leader of his council, put the irreversible nature of the loss very strongly.

Proactive team work will be precluded. Service issues of confidentiality, propriety and commercial benefit are at stake in relation to policy advice. Substantial increased costs are inevitable in the tendering process, briefing, monitoring and arbitration of claims and disputes. Role separation will result in design and specifications being changed from practice and practitioners from feedback.

Let me say a word about architectural and engineering services. Clarification is required on design and feasibility projects that are carried out in-house, outwith the architectural services department, to ascertain whether such work is excluded from competition. The market place is currently organised on a single-project basis, with professional services procured primarily by individual discipline. Clarification is required as to whether it would be anti-competitive to package work on, first, a full financial-year basis—or on the basis of a longer period—and, secondly, a multi-disciplinary basis.

My friend and political opponent Councillor Jimmy McGinley has made a special study of the effects on the architectural and legal departments. He, too, was entirely able to persuade me that it would be extremely imprudent not to take account of what really happens in council work. The quality and ability of contractors are crucial, and local authorities must be left with maximum flexibility in assessing those qualities and taking them into account.

The professional organisations have already pointed out that lowest price is not an appropriate method of assessing and appointing professional contractors. Applying CCT to professional services introduces serious problems of confidentiality, conflict of interest, indemnity insurance and so forth without a realistic prospect of improved efficiency or cost savings. Those potential problems will make contractor supervision expensive. In recessionary times, professional services in local authorities may seem attractive to the private sector, but the opposite is true in boom times. There will be serious consequences for local authorities.

Efficiency of professional services is best achieved by the introduction of trading accounts for all professional

units. There is no good reason for applying different rules to architects and property management. Trading accounts and league tables of local authorities—coupled with direct comparison of fees from the private sector—is a much better route to the measurement of efficiency.

Concern for quality is identified in relation to a proposed system of "two envelope" tendering, and a plea to professional institutions to recommend that low measurements of competition be built into the quality threshold. Quality and lowest cost are incompatible. The Government indicate pre-qualification on a quality threshold, but determination on lowest cost. The concept of "two envelope" tendering is related to determination and quality.

I have had my time, and I shall leave it at that, but these are serious questions, posed by practical, serious people.

8.2 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I give an unreserved welcome to the proposals in the Bill. They reflect the logical way forward for the development of local government services and structure, taking full account both of the experience and success of compulsory competitive tendering and of the undoubted wish of local people—including my constituents—for the return of unitary authorities.

During the Committee stage of the Local Government Bill 1988, I moved an amendment—it was later withdrawn—to add five services to the seven that, under the Bill, were already subject to CCT. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who was the Minister responsible for piloting the Bill through Committee, pointed out that the amendment was not necessary, because, under the Bill, such extensions would be made later by order. The advantage of this Bill is that it enables us to take full account of the experience of CCT to date.

Fourteen years ago, the country was moving in the opposite direction from that proposed in the Bill. The Labour Government of the day allowed direct labour organisations to provide local government services without a cost-competitive test: it even allowed them to provide other local authorities with such services. Indeed, Labour's 1979 election manifesto anticipated the further expansion of DLOs, in addition to the takeover of local building firms by workers' co-operatives. It was the "winter of discontent" which discredited for all time the notion that public service unions would put patients, and other consumers of services, above their own vested interests.

The present Government began to reverse that trend by putting DLOs to the test of competitive tender in building and maintenance in the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. However, the work of pioneering councils such as that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon)—who earlier reminded us graphically of its contribution—was required to prove that the tendering of service provision to private contractors was needed to expose the waste and inefficiencies that had been tolerated by town halls for far too long.

As we now know from research conducted by Birmingham university, the London business school and not least the Audit Commission, CCT works, achieving savings of 20 per cent. or more. More important, however, has been the direct effect that it has had on the entire management structure of local government at all levels—from the officers at the top to the point of delivery at the bottom. That has been experienced at first hand.

CCT has exposed gross inefficiencies that were formerly taken for granted by town halls and county halls. It has encouraged new attitudes, new methods and new training, and a far healthier relationship has developed between client and contractor, including direct service organisations. To date, however, the vast majority of contracts—some 80 per cent.—have gone to the DSOs, which did the work before CCT. There is nothing wrong with that; value for money is the principal test and, if the DSOs can do the work efficiently at the lowest possible cost, they should receive the contract. It is a pity that the prospect of tendering has had to act as a catalyst to produce improved efficiency.

Now that the private sector has had time to get its act together, with new companies—for instance, the water companies—now prepared to enter the field, I expect it to be more successful in bidding for the service contracts for which the Bill provides, as well as existing contracts when they come up for renewal.

One benefit of not extending CCT to further services until now has been the opportunity of learning from the experience to date—for example, the unfair practices adopted in favour of the DSOs. It is, for instance, clearly wrong to include internal redundancy and the winding-up costs of DSOs in calculating the total cost of a private-sector bid, as it is to define a contract so awkwardly that only the existing DSO would possibly fulfil it. Another example is the denial to all private-sector bids of access to council depots, along with the provision of such access for DSOs. The Bill will, I hope, outlaw all such public-sector biases.

It is, of course, equally fair to insist on a level playing field for public-sector tenderers, to allow them to bid for private-sector contracts. They cannot do that now. For example, the building design practice section of the former architects' department of Dorset county council will have to make staff redundant or cease operation altogether if it does not succeed in its present bid to retain all its duties next year. It has sought permission to tender for work in the private sector which would broaden its experience; unfortunately, it cannot legally do that now. Such a development could only enhance competition, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear it in mind in Committee.

Experience of the 1988 Act also suggests that we should now ensure that the quality of professional services, such as architecture and engineering, is fully taken into account in the contract process, as the original Bill proposed before its amendment in the other place. I am pleased to learn that my right hon. Friend is proposing a new formula for a quality threshold clause. It must be right to insist that those submitting bids have the expertise, experience and resources to complete the contract for which they have put in a bid.

Mr. O'Brien: If it is correct that quality should be included in compulsory competitive tendering for white collar services, how can the hon. Gentleman say that that should not apply to compulsory competitive tendering for other local government services?

Mr. Atkinson: The hon. Gentleman has made a good point. He intends, perhaps, to say that a level playing field

[Mr. Atkinson]

should apply to existing services, subject to the contract process, as well as to what is being proposed in the Bill for white collar services.

As a result of compulsory competitive tendering, local government services are being undertaken today more efficiently, to a higher standard, at better value and at a saving of millions of pounds to the charge payer. Usually they are being undertaken by a happier, more fulfilled and better-rewarded management and work force, yet Labour still talks about abolishing CCT and the Audit Commission which pointed the way to such achievements. On the contrary, I hope that the Government will commit themselves to going still further in the privatisation of local government services. I suggest that the 24 provincial airports, 54 ports and harbours and 38 bus companies should be privatised, all of which remain in council hands.

As for the provisions that will establish a local government commission, I point out to the Minister that the prospect of a return to a unitary authority has been particularly welcomed by those of my constituents who remember Bournemouth as it was until 1974—a county borough council. It was a great mistake to abolish the county boroughs, the finest units of local government anywhere in the world. I do not believe that the schools, roads, libraries, public protection, traffic management and the magistracy in my constituency have been better served by remote control from county hall, given the competing priorities of a mainly rural county and the absence of personal local knowledge and accountability that borough councillors provide.

Unfortunately, unlike my local Conservative association, which has submitted clear proposals for Bournemouth to have as much control over its own services as possible, our local Liberal council is calling for additional tiers of local government, such as neighbourhood councils and regional authorities. Like so much else of Liberal policy—all of which is adopted by default—these proposals will lead to greater bureaucracy, add to the cost of local government, for which the charge payers must pay, and will be unnecessary if local councillors are doing their job properly, with proper two-way communication between themselves and those whom they are elected to represent.

Moreover, the Liberal alternative of a single authority in my part of Dorset, which is dubbed by the local press as Wessex city, for an entire Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole conurbation would be a disaster locally. The common pooling of resources and the sharing of services between two or three of these authorities must arise from sensible negotiation on common problems such as tourism and community care and must not be imposed upon them by statute.

In determining the districts that are to become unitary authorities, the new commission will appreciate that there cannot be a return to what happened before 1973. Thanks to this Government's policies, local government has evolved to a considerable extent. It is local government's new role, as an enabler of services and as the contractor of services, that justifies this important review. There is no longer any question of returning to the unnecessary duplication, by districts, at the expense of economies of scale that justified strengthening the counties in 1973. Nor does any future reorganisation have to be as costly, as was demonstrated by the abolition of the metropolitan counties a few years ago.

It is essential that the commission should include among its membership the practical input of serving councillors at all levels to determine the merits, costs and benefits of the submissions that will be made to it. I look forward to the Minister's assurances on that point. I welcome the appointment of Sir John Banham as the commission's chairman, in view of both his Audit Commission past and his undoubted success at the Confederation of British Industry.

I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment intends the new local authorities to be in place and to take over in May 1994. Presumably, therefore, he has in mind elections to those local authorities in May 1993, next year, and believes that they should shadow the present authorities, as happened between 1973 and 1974 when the previous local government reorganisation took place. I hope that the Minister will confirm that that is to be the programme.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I understand that before the 1974 reorganisation there were no elections and that the local authorities set up joint arrangements for the distribution of services in preparation for subsequent elections. What the hon. Gentleman says is historically incorrect and, in practical terms, is an utter shambles.

Mr. Atkinson: I well recall being elected to the new Essex county council, representing a Southend ward, having previously served on Southend county borough council. Between May 1973 and May 1974 we acted as a shadow council, preparing to take over and working with the existing retiring council on our new responsibilities.

I am sure that I speak for most of my constituents when I say that we greatly look foward to this opportunity to restore a Conservative administration to Bournemouth, in view of the increase in the community charge that is threatened for the forthcoming fiscal year. It cannot come soon enough.

8.16 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Earlier this evening a Conservative Member offered the opinion that this is a conservative country—he hastened to add with a small "c". I think that he is likely to find out before many more weeks are over that the country is less conservative than he cares to believe. It is certainly a lot more conservationist.

It is a pity that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has had to leave for a meeting. An interesting article in today's *Daily Record* shows that my hon. Friend has been named as the most environmentally friendly of all Scottish Members of Parliament. That was said by a panel of expert ecologists, led by David Bellamy. Interestingly enough, the same group was asked for nominations for the booby prize when it came to environmental issues. One of the nominees was none other than the Secretary of State for the Environment. That says a great deal about this Government if the Secretary of State can be nominated for the booby prize by those who are most concerned about these issues.

I intend to refer to clauses 8 to 11. I did not hear all of the Secretary of State's speech, but for several hours I have

listened to Conservative Members speak about the Bill's provisions. I still have to be told why the Government refuse to make public the results of the PA Consulting Group study. Could it possibly be because they were advised against putting out a number of services to tender? They have received advice that certain services are not candidates, or are not good candidates, for compulsory competitive tendering. The examples given included the development of corporate strategy, committee administration, membership services, electoral registration, financial planning and advice and personnel recruitment, yet we find that they are on the list of services proposed to be pushed out to compulsory competitive tendering.

The Government published a consultation paper at the same time as they published the Bill. If the Government seriously intend to consult people properly, I wonder what time scale they have in mind. What assurance can any of us possibly have that the Government will pay any attention whatsoever to views expressed against the contents of the consultation paper?

That is especially the case when one considers that in Scotland in particular the Government asked for people's views about hospitals being taken out of the national health service and given trust status. Despite the fact that the Government consulted widely and were told by the vast majority of people that they were against hospitals being given trust status, and the doctors were against it, they went ahead and imposed trust status upon hospitals in Scotland. Such consultation must be regarded with much suspicion. We know perfectly well that the consultation period will be short and that the Government do not intend to pay the slightest intention to views, no matter how well informed, that are contrary to their wishes.

I have seen a long list of services that the Government intend to put out to compulsory competitive tender, of which I am sure Conservative Members are well aware. I could hardly believe my eyes when I read that home-to-school transport was included. I should have thought that, above all, it is essential to have a reliable service so that parents know that their children are safe. If other, more lucrative contracts are won by the firm that wins the local government contract, it might easily let down the local authority. Where will that leave children? I am not talking only about them making their way home in bad weather, but young school children who are vulnerable and could be endangered by traffic and people of ill will. That proposal requires second thoughts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) mentioned corporate services such as personnel. We are all aware of firms offering their services as head hunters and selectors of personnel, but what about the important personnel functions of training for the skills that are necessary in a local authority? What about the difficult issues of discipline and dealing with appeals by employees? I cannot see how an outside firm will be able to deal with such issues fairly. How will employees be able to place their trust in the objectivity of the judgment of an outside firm, paid by the local authority?

I can hardly credit the Government's proposals for financial services. The accounts of large councils such as Glasgow district council run into millions of pounds and have to be brought in on time. Year-on-year estimates are an enormous job. A local council may be left in severe difficulties if it is let down by a company that has been awarded the contract. Local authorities already find it hard to cope because of the Government's impositions on them, but the Bill does not seem to heed the need for efficiency of local authorities.

No Scottish local authority has faced sanctions under sections 13 or 14 of the Local Government Act 1988, which permits the issue by the Secretary of State of a written notice requiring an authority to justify any actions which he feels are anti-competitive, following which the Secretary of State may issue a direction to the authority preventing it from carrying out all or part of the work concerned or stating particular conditions which must be fulfilled before it has the power to carry out the work. Once again, because of Conservative Members' hostility to Labour-controlled English authorities, a Bill is being introduced that is not relevant to Scottish authorities.

Hon. Members have mentioned the commission for local government but they have got that slightly wrong. The commission is for England, not for Scotland. The Secretary of State for Scotland was asked to explain that some months ago in the Scottish Grand Committee and replied that Scotland was small enough for the commission not to be required. That is an extraordinary attitude. The Secretary of State for Scotland will define anti-competitive behaviour. He is a bit like the queen in "Alice in Wonderland": he defines it and imposes his will.

Last Saturday night, the four leaders of the main political parties in Scotland debated constitutional issues at Usher hall in Edinburgh. The Secretary of State was pressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) about his plans for Scotland's constitutional future. The right hon. Gentleman was coy and refused to answer—perhaps because one of the plans was that he will define what is meant by anti-competitive behaviour. He knows that the Bill is not wanted or needed in Scotland and that the majority of Scottish people oppose it.

Despite the Government's hostility, local authorities have succeeded in winning the majority of in-house contracts. The Government want such nice little earners to go to their chums in the private sector. I wonder where it will end. I sometimes suspect that some more extreme Conservative Members will put the monarchy out to tender; if so, I think that the Fyfes may be able to undercut the Windsors! Conservative Members have said how popular the Bill will be, but none of them tried to pretend that it is wanted in Scotland.

It appears that the Scottish national party failed to express a desire to speak in this debate. I am unaware of it expressing a desire to take part in the Committee. It turned down the opportunity to serve on the council tax Bill. Scottish nationalists are often absent from debates and votes on what they call United Kingdom Bills but which seriously affect people living in Scottish constituencies. They have been challenged about their poor work rate for their salaries, but have excused themselves on the ground that they are doing other things in Scotland. Some of us think that more effort is required. Hon. Members can deal with their constituents' needs, campaign for what they believe in, and do their job in here to earn their salaries. We do not think that Scottish nationalists should try to get away with such excuses.

They can talk up a good fight. It is very easy to tell supporters how much one disagrees with the Government, but it requires more effort to be in here, challenging the Government and demanding answers. That is what we shall do in Committee.

8.28 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): No Session, even a short one, is complete without a local government Bill. I am glad that this Bill has been introduced because it is the most important Bill to come before the House for 20 years. It is more important than the flagship Local Government Finance Bill that is being scuttled at the breakers' yard. Indeed, it is more important than the salvage tug Local Government Finance Bill that was recently before the House. It is more important than any local government finance Bill that the Opposition might dream up should they unfortunately be governing the country after the next election. If we are to make sense of the Bill and to understand its importance, we must think through why it seems like that to so many of us. The answer is that the structure of local government is the key to success.

Structure is far more significant for success—or for anything else—than finance, a point which seems to have escaped the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) who, in his opening remarks this afternoon, said that structure follows function. Indeed, his comments were echoed by the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), who said that before one decides structure, one must decide what local government is going to do. I want to show how such sentiments are fatally flawed and, indeed, how such sentiments got us into this mess in the first place.

The Bill seeks to put right the errors of the Local Government Act 1972. It has been suggested that that Act was all about my party, but we have heard two comments from the Opposition which show that if they were in control they would still make the mistakes of 1972.

However, the Bill is not only about the aberrations of Avon and Cleveland. It is not even about the gratuitous insults to some of our historic cities. It is about the whole concept of two-tier local government. When I intervened, I said that I was implacably opposed to two-tier local government, although I would defend the rights of people who believe that it is better for them.

Two-tier local government flies in the face of how people feel about themselves, of how society instinctively organises itself and of how clients and consumers think about the services that they need. Therefore, the key to getting local government structure right is to understand the true nature of the communities to which people think that they belong.

Those communities are not defined by the cost of service delivery, which is why the Opposition are wrong to say that we keep focusing on cost. Cost is not the bottom line when defining natural communities. Of course, that might be true of services, but that is a different issue. Getting structure right is not about defining areas according to managerial convenience but about something fundamentally different. The good news is that, if we can get our structures right, basing them on the correct criteria, local government will flourish.

However, the bad news—especially for my colleagues who say that all one needs to do is to get the community right and all will be well—is that we all belong to many different types of communities. The right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) said that when he praised the virtues of the historic counties. Of course we feel strongly about our historic and cultural background, but that has nothing to do with service delivery. If one is proud to belong to Lancashire and one lives in the north of it, one would not dream of sending a child to school in the south of it. One's longing to be back in Lancashire is entirely different. Therefore, the bad news is that if we search for natural communities and think that there is just one such community and that if we could find it all would be well, it would be a search for fool's gold.

If we are to put structures right, we must be absolutely clear why successive Governments—and I stress the word "successive"—keep getting it wrong. I believe that the reason is that successive Governments have failed to think through the simple idea of who owns local government. Some people say that local people own it, and I have heard several hon. Members say that today. Other people will say that central Government own it. I think that one or two Conservatives say that out loud sometimes. Because of those two ideas—that local people or central Government own it—there will be problems, which is exactly what we are experiencing now. If only there were a simple answer, we would not be discussing the issue again.

The reality is that both local people and central Government own local government. Local government has a dual nature, and unless we embody that dual nature in its structure we shall continue to flounder and argue with one another and we shall not make progress.

What do we mean when we say that local government belongs to the people? In those circumstances, it is about meeting people's needs. When people say that they own local government, they want it to meet their needs within areas in which they are prepared to move. However, when we talk about local government belonging to or being created by central Government, that is entirely different. We are talking about just one of a range of vehicles for the local delivery of national services. Local government is just one of many, alongside quangos, central Government and the voluntary and private sectors.

The dual nature arises for a key reason, which is that the needs of the people and the services that are provided to meet them are fundamentally different, and the failure to grasp that fact has got us into this mess. The failure to grasp the fact that needs and services are different led to the 1972 Act and will again lead to mistakes if we continue to organise our structures on the basis of service requirements.

Another issue that we need to think through is why it is so easy to get into this mess in the first place. I think it is because the needs to which I have referred and the services which meet them are territorial. Needs have territories: people expect to go to school in a particular area and to do their shopping in a particular area. Services are territorial: that is how they are organised and managed. For that reason, it is very tempting for those who design them to say, "Wouldn't it be neat and tidy if we could make the same territory cover both needs and services?"

However, the truth is that, except in places such as the Scilly Isles and the Isle of Wight, needs territories and service territories rarely coincide. For example, a district general hospital almost always serves several local communities, but most individual local communities have more than one general practitioner's practice area within it.

It is important to notice that such examples which easily come to mind are outside local government. That is because people outside local government instinctively seem to understand that one designs service delivery according to the requirements of the service, not according

to the geography of the communities. For example, electricity companies organise themselves according to where their wires go, and water companies organise themselves according to where their pipes go, so why in heaven's name should anyone argue that fire services and libraries need the same territories? They do not—they need their own. They are nothing to do with needs but everything to do with services.

Whenever I say such things—especially when members of the Opposition have bothered to turn up and join in the debate—I am criticised. Indeed, throughout these debates my colleagues will run into flak not only from the Opposition, but from councillors of all political persuasions and also from a fair number of officers. I say to such people who shrug their shoulders and say that this is nonsense that I should take such criticism far more seriously if it came from an organisation called local government which people liked a great deal more than they seem to.

At the moment local government, despite its protestations, is not held in high regard by the public. One has only to consider the turnout at local elections and the comments that people make about the quality and cost of services to realise that. If I listen long enough—and I spend a great deal of time listening—I hear three themes. The first is that all the talk about such changes is impractical. The second—and we have heard it this afternoon—is that such changes weaken accountability. The third is that the changes undermine local government itself. The claim that the changes are impractical does not bear close examination. I accept that having many different territories is not neat and tidy, but the real world is not neat and tidy, unfortunately for us. I accept that having many different territories means many different arrangements for the delivery of services, but that is the real world as well.

The health service organises itself in its own way and the lawyers organise themselves in a different way. The retail sector, with its grocery shops and other shops, organises itself differently. The whole world of service delivery is different outside local government. We must stop trying to be neat and tidy just because we seek a local government solution that looks nice on the map.

To say that community X is too small to provide its own schools is to repeat the mistake of 1972. It confuses the needs of people with the services that meet them. School territories—deciding how big an area one wants to run schools economically, efficiently and effectively—is a service argument. Children needing education live in communities, whether we like it or not, and they expect to go to school in those communities. They do not expect to be told by county hall or by Whitehall what is convenient for the service.

It is claimed that all my arguments undermine accountability. We heard that argument from the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), who kept saying that we need accountable local government. We heard it from the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who spoke about the situation in London. He asked how on earth joint authorities could be accountable. I now live much of my life in London, and I have noticed that fires are still put out. A joint fire authority seems to function perfectly well. I have news for the hon. Gentleman. If I called the fire brigade and it did not come, I would not fret about which councillor or which council was responsible. I should go down to the fire station, talk to the fire fighters and hold them accountable. That is the nature of accountability.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman would do what?

Mr. Wilshire: Does the hon. Gentleman want to intervene to challenge me? Obviously not.

Accountability is not in the ownership of democracy and it is utter nonsense to say that it is. Hon. Members should try telling that to a shop assistant who has sold faulty goods. He or she understands what accountability is about and does not need local government to explain it. Hon. Members should try telling that to a youth club leader when a member of that club has been involved in an accident. The youth club leader understands that he or she does not need local government to worry about that accident. Hon. Members should try telling anybody outside local government, "You cannot be held accountable unless the local democratic process is involved."

Accountability flows directly from the person who provides the service to the person who uses it. It does not go via a third party, whether that third party is elected or not. When I go into a shop, when I go to see a doctor or when I use any other service, I expect the people who are providing it, not some magical person way out in the distance, to be accountable. That is the true nature of accountability.

The reason why accountability gets muddled up is that those in local government who keep arguing about accountability are really talking about power. They are asking what they are accountable for—what they have power and control over. They overlook the other side of accountability, which is to ask who they have duties to. Those duties are to those whom they represent. Those duties are to ensure that all needs are met. If only those who argue about power and control and about local government having to have an oar in something would focus on duties, they would broaden the horizon of councillors to include the provision of all services and the meeting of all needs, not only those of which they can get control.

Another theme is that the Bill somehow undermines local government itself. The Bill touches on all the points that I have mentioned. The people who talk like that, who say that services should not be taken away from them and that they need them under their control, say, "Do not force us to seek tenders because there is something mystical about the way in which we do things. Do not publish nasty facts about us because it might undermine public confidence in local government." Such people, who are not confined to one party, seem to say, "Just remove a tier of local government and then go away."

The Association of County Councils would abolish the Association of District Councils, and the ADC would abolish the ACC. Our mailbags are full of that. The trouble with both arguments is that we are considering boundaries, structures and organisations which were two-tier solutions, and it is the two-tier solution itself that is wrong. We need to go back to the drawing board, and we need to become involved in those issues. That is why I welcome the Bill.

The Bill repairs the damage done in 1972. It gives us a chance to get the structures of local government right and it will enable us, if we do get them right, to get local

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government closer to the people. The Bill will broaden the horizons of local government so that it concerns itself with all services, and it will switch the focus of local government away from power and control to meeting the needs of local people. If that is right—and I believe that it is—the Bill is vital. It offers us an opportunity to improve local government, to improve local services, and to meet more needs of local people. If we get it right, the result will be a new, respected and secure role for local government in the long term. Such a prize deserves more than party bickering; it deserves the support of everyone in the House.

8.45 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to all hon. Members for my failure to attend earlier. I assure the House that I have not been dragooned in here by people behind the Chair. I have been sitting as a member of the Select Committee on Social Services considering the role of pension funds and especially that of Mirror Group Newspapers. A discussion that should have taken an hour lasted two and a half hours. I hope to make up in Committee for my late arrival; I say that to cheer up the Minister of State.

I am an adviser to the Greater Manchester fire authority, and before I was elected to the House and for a short time afterwards I was a member of the fire and civil defence authority and the Labour party's spokesperson on that body. Since coming to the House, I have maintained an interest in the fire service as an integral part of local government services.

In England and Wales, there are 64 brigades and all of them are concerned about the consequences of the Bill for the provision of in-house services by fire brigades. it is important to make it clear that every hour fire fighters put their lives at risk—sometimes in a futile effort—to protect the lives of individuals in their community. It is vital that the way in which we deliver the fire service and in which equipment is delivered at the point where it is needed is professional and protects the fire fighters in their role in the community.

It is dangerous enough to be a fire fighter on every occasion when the bell goes in the station. It is essential that equipment, such as turntable ladders, extinguishers providing foam and other fire-fighting materials, is provided and maintained to a professional standard which meets the requirements and safety regulations for the fire fighter and for those who, unfortunately, require the use of the service to protect property, lives or, in most instances, both.

The uniqueness of the fire service led to the exemptions in the Local Government Act 1988. It was in 1988 that the Government made their first ideological stab by taking away effective control of many services from local authorities. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) encapsulated the ideological view of Conservative Members when he said that the bottom line was value for money. The fire service is not just about value for money as one cannot give a life a price—whether that life is the one saved or the one being put at risk as a fireman tries to save another life from fire, smoke, dangerous hazards such as chemicals or bombings.

Hon. Members, Treasury spokesmen and Opposition spokesmen offer plaudits on the work of the fire service, but in this legislation the Government are prepared to put political ideology before the necessity of constantly maintaining the equipment that protects those who put their lives at risk to save others. That is why the Bill is so unacceptable. It is not just an ideological attempt to undermine other local government services. It is one thing to sit in a local authority office dealing with housing problems, but it is quite another matter when a fireman is 30 ft up a turntable ladder in a temperature of 1,000 deg C trying to save people or at least ensure that the bodies of loved ones are brought out and given decent burials. Those are the realities on the front line of the fire service.

The Local Government Act 1988 recognised three factors—first, the uniqueness of the vehicles provided for the fire service; secondly, the high standards that must be maintained due to the statutory duties imposed by the Home Office. It is interesting that no Home Office Minister is present this evening. The Home Office is responsible for the current review of fire services as they are affected by compulsory tendering, but during the Bill's passage no Minister is available to answer questions or take note of the issues rightly raised by the fire services during the so-called period of consultation.

Thirdly, there is a statutory requirement to maintain the hydraulic pumping and mechanical equipment to a high enough standard to meet the other statutory obligations of reaching a fire within a specific time, maintaining certain levels and types of equipment at all times and ensuring that it is in working order. However, the Government say that, since 1988, there have been developments in commercial vehicle maintenance that overcome the special needs of maintaining fire service vehicles. Will the Minister list the developments, who prepared them and say what report on them is available to the Home Office or the Secretary of State for the Environment? My contacts in the fire service, which are widespread and include those in fire brigades in Labour-controlled and Conservative-controlled local authorities as well as in those with no overall control, all state clearly that they do not know of any of the so-called revolutionary developments. The reality is that such developments do not exist. The truth is that the Minister of State is showing his zeal to maintain the momentum towards compulsory competitive tendering in all sectors of local government services, including the fire service, which provides unique services to the community.

In the debate in another place Viscount Mersey encapsulated the view of all right-thinking people on the Government's position. He would normally be expected to support the Government but he said:

> "Fire Brigades are unique. They are required by law to be at an accident within a specific time. Fire Brigades have their own highly specialised capital intensive workshops which have a faultless track record and which I believe no private competitor could hope to match. Even if they did manage to match it, there would be a learning period in which the Government would literally be putting people's lives at risk whilst the private contractor learned a new craft of fire engine maintenance."

A supporter of the Government made the grave charge that, in relation to the Bill, the Government's ideology would put people's lives at risk. In the light of such charges, the professionalism of the fire fighters in the

United Kingdom and the advice that the Home Office is already receiving, I hope that the Minister will state clearly that the fire service will be exempt from the proposals.

I wish to put several questions to the Minister and if he cannot answer them all this evening perhaps he will do so in writing after he has had consultations with his Home Office counterparts. If not, perhaps he will give detailed answers at a later stage of the Bill's passage. It is quite clear that there is a serious risk that a contract could cease operation for financial or commercial reasons such as bankruptcy or takeovers. That would leave a fire brigade with serious difficulties in maintaining its 24-hour, 365-day emergency cover.

It would be incredible if competitive tendering meant that the very basis of maintaining a high standard of care of vehicles and other life-saving equipment was put at risk by bankruptcy, impending bankruptcy or other financial difficulties within the commercial enterprise that was operating the support services for the fire brigade. Surely such circumstances should not be contemplated. To say that they would never arise is nonsense. We all know of the present huge number of bankruptcies—there are almost 1,000 a week in the current recession in the United Kingdom. In my district, the north-west, more than 120 companies go bust every week. Who is to say that those firms going bankrupt are not the ones that provide the life-saving back-up facilities for organisations such as the fire brigade? For that reason alone, never mind all the others, the Government should cease promoting the policy of contracting out such an important life-saving service.

There will be conflicts of priority between brigade emergency vehicles and commercial customers. If an organisation is involved in the preparation of materials for the fire service, unless there is an overriding guarantee to cover all circumstances, fire brigade vehicles and equipment could be put to the bottom of the list of priorities in that workshop. That would undermine the maintenance of the 24-hour service—a statutory requirement laid down by the Home Office. There must be day-to-day monitoring of work and changes to agreed contractual arrangments. Unless such monitoring takes place on the spot by fire service personnel there will be no guarantee that a fire tender or fire-fighting equipment will not break down. Such break-downs normally occur at the scene of an incident and put at risk the chances of rescuing people from buildings. They even place fire fighters' lives at risk. That is unacceptable.

On-the-spot judgments about the professionalism of fire fighters and the quality of care of the vehicles and equipment must be taken by the chief fire officers of fire brigades. That will happen only if he controls the day-to-day operation and discipline—it is a disciplined, uniform service.

I shall submit in writing to the Minister of State my worries on matters relating to the expertise of outside contractors, contractors' responses in relation to emergency services and the immobilisation of fire brigade equipment and materials that are necessary, particularly when fire brigades are asked to respond to major accidents, whether motorway pile-ups, bombings or other incidents. It is vital that we have clear guidance from the Minister or from the Home Office about the requirements for competitive tenders in respect of outside organisations, to ensure the maintenance of emergency cover in the face of emergencies experienced by fire brigades daily. When such emergencies occur, the complete mobilisation of all a brigade's resources will be required. That cannot be guaranteed unless workshops are under the direct control of a fire authority and, in particular, of the chief fire officer.

For those and other reasons, I hope that the Minister will provide some guidance tonight. Will the Government continue the folly of putting fire services at risk of competitive tendering? Does the review being carried out by the Home Office reveal opposition from the fire services and, in particular, from chief fire officers? If so, will the Government withdraw such competitive tendering proposals for fire brigades?

The Government must listen to their professional advisers, the chief fire officers. They are responsible to the Home Office by law. They must provide advice about the fire services. No Conservative Member would disagree that the chief fire officers in Britain are part of the most dedicated and professional fire service in Europe.

The Bill must not undermine the capability of Britain's fire services to maintain and save lives from the point of view of those affected by fire and, as importantly, from the point of view of fire fighters who daily try to save other people's lives without thinking of their own. The Bill attempts to put a price on life, but it is impossible to do that.

9 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): The House has listened with interest to the forceful speech made by the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) and to his impassioned plea for adequate provision for emergency and essential services. No one would disagree with him about that. However, we must recognise that all services, no matter how life saving and essential they may be, cannot be provided without regard to cost. Cost is an essential part of both parts of the Bill, which I welcome.

With regard to part I and compulsory competitive tendering, Opposition Members failed to differentiate between compulsory contracting out and compulsory competitive tendering. We are talking not about compulsory contracting out of services provided by local government but about the right, on an equal and fair basis, for private provision to be assessed in conjunction with direct labour organisations. That is wholly proper and in the interests of community charge payers. As trustees of the public purse, we should welcome that tonight.

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) mounted an attack on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. He seemed to accuse my right hon. Friend of having little knowledge of local government, of not being prepared to go far enough in his proposals and of not being prepared to embark on radical change of local government in a way, supposedly, the Labour party would. I can think of few people to whom such criticisms should be less directed than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. My right hon. Friend introduced the housing legislation that gave council tenants the right to buy their own homes. He grasped the difficult political nettle of abolishing the community charge and replacing it with the new council tax. He introduced the present Bill. Over a decade or more, he has presided over major reforms of local government of which this Bill is the latest and the most welcome.

While I welcome the provisions relating to the powers of the Audit Commission and compulsory competitive tendering, I want to consider part II which relates to the

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structure of local government. My constituency of Chichester is in the county of West Sussex and we are well served by Conservative-controlled district and county councils. It is difficult for me to advance a strong case for radical change in the structure of that system of local government when it is providing such good services on an accountable and low-cost basis to my constituents. I hope that the local government commission will recognise that.

We are considering a Bill which is necessary for several reasons. First, there has been a radical change in the system of local government finance. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we cannot consider finance separately from structure. Also, several of local government's responsibilities have changed—for example, in education, in community care and housing. It is appropriate now to consider whether a new structure is called for. Much has also been said about Avon and Humberside, where the need for change may be more apparent.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) said that he hopes that we will be able to retain in some parts of the country a structure which has served communities well and which reflects the distinctive nature particularly of large disparate rural communities. There are large rural areas which do not have one predominant conurbation in their midst. The existing structures of some district services and some county services have worked well.

I have one criterion in considering the reform of local government—whether it will deliver to my constituents cheaper or better-quality services. Unless it can be shown beyond doubt that the services that my constituents receive will be of better value, involve a wider choice, or be of a better quality, I do not see the case for a radical, traumatic and costly upheaval in local government. My constituents are entitled to ask, "What is in it for us?" If the answer is that there is not a great deal in reform for them, there is no point in embarking on change for the sake of change.

In the remit of the local government commission and the guidance that has already been issued and which is the subject of consultation, the Government go a long way to relieving some of our concerns, because they lay emphasis not only on the cost of services provided but, first and foremost, on the community identity of local councils. They state a preference for unitary authorities, but, at the same time, they recognise that different structures may be appropriate in different parts of the country.

We in West Sussex believe that we have an exemplary Conservative-controlled county council whose spending last year was 8 per cent. below the standard spending assessment. This year, its spending will be 7 per cent. below the standard spending assessment. Our county council has no debt whatsoever, and therefore no financing charges to bear. As a result of the prudence of Conservative-controlled county and district councils, we pay £58 per head less than we would otherwise have to pay. That is a real dividend in my constituents' pockets. At the same time, a range of services has been improved. On education in particular, *The Times* lists us as having the third best examination results in the country.

Not only at county level but at district level, that success is reflected in Conservative management. In the Chichester division, for example, we have been able to provide increased housing enablement facilities and improved environmental protection and litter and dog control, yet we have been able to do that by budgeting at or below the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Bellotti: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nelson: I shall not give way because of the time. The cost to my constituents in terms of the average community charge is £170. I advise the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) to go down the road to the district of Adur where, for similar services in a similar area, people pay £266. That is the difference between Liberal and Conservative control in Sussex—£192 for a couple.

Mr. Bellotti: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nelson: I have no time. With regret, I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman on this occasion.

Local authorities should not indulge in a dog-eat-dog attitude. We should not put on their employees a blight of uncertainty pending local government reform. I hope that, as soon as possible, the local government commission will spell out to local authorities and to the Secretary of State areas such as West Sussex in which no change may be preferable to radical reform. However, in other parts of the country, change is much needed and there is no reason why we should adopt the same pattern nationwide.

I hope and believe that the local government commission will serve a real purpose in bringing forward reform which is now overdue, which is in line with Conservative party policies, and which will deliver value for money and improve the quality of services—the hallmarks of good Conservative control. The Bill sets that process on its way, and I congratulate the Government on introducing it.

9.8 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I speak as someone who until last May served as a councillor in a metropolitan district. As such, I must be one of the few hon. Members who has seen the practical effects of the implementation of legislation such as this, and not simply the ideology behind it.

The council that I had the honour to serve was Bradford which, from October 1988, suffered the so-called "people's revolution". That was the authority that caused so much scandal as a result of the compulsory competitive tendering legislation with such iniquitous dealings in the management buy-outs of the school meals service that the Audit Commission had to issue special guidelines for all future cases. Against all advice and costings, the Conservative council awarded the catering contract for Bradford's theatres to an outside company that was even more expensive than the in-house team. After three months, the contract had to be cancelled. The Conservative authority also awarded the contract for vehicle maintenance to a company which, because of its failure to perform, was already in litigation with our neighbouring council. Those are some of the practical effects of compulsory competitive tendering in which ideology takes the place of practicality and common sense.

The Bill refers to the requirement to publish certain types of information. Perhaps we should consider publishing details of the many failures in Conservative councils throughout the country, and not least in the

borough in which this House is situated which, while exporting its homeless to other authorities, appears to be guilty of the illegal sale of houses that were not its to sell in the first place. Perhaps we should consider giving widespread publicity to the Audit Commission's account of the Government's failings. That could be done by means of a supplement to the citizens charter and could be delivered to every household in the country. There have been reports on poll tax collection, care in the community, housing benefit administration, the cost of providing bed-and-breakfast accommodation, and into the incredible disgrace of the state of school buildings throughout the country—not forgetting, of course, the report that praised the cost-effectiveness of direct labour organisations, contrary to the thrust of Government legislation.

Omissions from the Bill are perhaps as significant as its contents. The legislation takes no account of the expense that is incurred when a council puts work out to tender. It costs thousands of pounds to draw up the documentation. People put together their bids only to find that the work invariably stays with the in-house team. I am no great lover or defender of the legal profession. Since the admirable legislation relating to guardians ad litem was enacted, and since the passing of the Children Act 1989, social services work has involved much extra legal work. The going rate for solicitors in Bradford to work on such legislation is about £60 per hour, whereas the in-house price is about £14 per hour. However, as a result of this legislation, somebody will no doubt have to go to the expense of drawing up tenders and specifications and of sending them out. In the end, all that expense will probably be wasted.

The failure to recognise the difference between public concern about standards and public concern about price is what makes the Bill deficient. If cost alone is to determine the level of service that is provided, we shall no doubt see Ministers trading in their Jaguars for Ladas——

Mr. McCartney: Or Trabants.

Mr. Rooney: Yes, or Trabants.

In Yorkshire, we have an expression, "You don't get owt for nowt." Unfortunately, there is a price to pay for everything and, under this Government, that price is measured by what we call the poll tax and will soon no doubt be measured by the council tax.

If we had stuck with the fair rates policy the vast majority of people in Britain might have been able to bear that price and public services would remain public services, not sacrificial lambs on the altar of the ideology of the Conservative party. As with a similar Bill that was around at about this time in 1987, this Bill is the product of the Government's imagination. At the election it will undoubtedly turn into a nightmare for them.

9.14 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): In view of the shortage of time, my speech will be rather more in note form than I intended, but I hope that the points that I make will be clear. I join in the general welcome for the Bill among Conservative Members. When examining the structure of local government and establishing the local government commission, one could not make any better start than the appointment of Sir John Banham as the chairman of the commission if one wants common sense, quality decision making and a tough-minded approach.

There is a strong feeling, certainly among Conservatives in local government, that we need to appoint people with direct local government experience to the commission. That has been reflected among Conservatives in Parliament to some extent. When that aim is interpreted, or at least when it comes out of the other end of the machine, it results in the odd ex-chief executive being appointed. That is not what I mean. Of course, there is a place for one or two chief executives, but I can think of several names, which I will not mention, of former Labour and Conservative council leaders who could make an enormous contribution. I hope that some of those names will be borne in mind by my hon. Friend the Minister.

I have a preference, and a preference is shown in the spirit of the Bill, for unitary authorities. Let us make one comparison. If West Yorkshire can manage without a county council and manage well, and the West Yorkshire district councils can carry out the necessary functions, why does Derbyshire have to be encumbered with a county council? There is a strong feeling in Derbyshire that the county council is an encumbrance and that the sooner that it goes, the better. However, I do not intend to get embroiled in the arguments between the districts and the counties. If I do, I may find myself kebabed between the two. They can sort out their own arguments.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right about the public relations campaigns being run by the counties and districts. They are a complete waste of taxpayers' and charge payers' money. The councils should understand that the campaigns will have no effect. Even Humberside county council is launching a campaign to show the people that they have been wrong all these years and should have loved it. Some campaigns are doomed to failure from the start and that one will certainly be a waste of time.

The question to be asked is how the popularity of the final proposals is to be tested. We should not go so far as to hold a referendum, but the people must have the final say.

I wish to say a few words about what measures we would be considering if we had the misfortune to have a Labour Government. Rather than moving towards unitary authorities we would be considering the re-establishment of the Greater London council—a new, larger and uglier version. One would not think that that was Labour's intention from reading the document "London United" issued by the Labour party, but one would know it from reading the draft of that document which the Labour party did not dare publish. If it had published the full document as originally written, we would know that there are some real nasties in it.

For example, housing strategy would go to the GLC. The hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) rightly told us that it would be impossible for a county council to run housing strategy. Yet that is what the Labour party promises for the new GLC. It wants to give tourism back to the GLC, yet the only contribution that the GLC made to tourism was to destabilise and almost destroy the London tourist board.

Despite the GLC's lack of success with London buses and the London underground, the Labour party wants to give back to the GLC not only the buses and the underground but Network SouthEast. That would not go down well with my constituents or with many people in the south-east of England.

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To crown it all, it is people like the extremists—in some cases, frankly, nut cases—who run some Labour authorities in London that the Labour party wants to see running London's police. The Labour party's draft document, which it did not dare to publish, refers to London policing functions. No wonder the party did not dare publish that document.

The Audit Commission must be free to cause discomfort. Of course it says things that are uncomfortable for the Government and for local authorities. Howard Davies has done a very good job there. I wonder how long he would last in the emasculated Audit Commission about which the Labour party has talked. The Labour party has form in standing up for secrecy in local government, in opposing the publication of school results or of any other kind of league table. That is why the party opposes this part of the Bill. Its approach to cost comparisons is to say that they are not fair, whereas the Conservative approach is to ask, "How can we do better? How can we provide a better service?"

The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), in a half sentence that he perhaps did not mean to utter, let the cat out of the bag. He said that the real problem was a failure of local government funding. In other words, like all of his Labour colleagues, he is promising paradise when he should be talking about priorities. Labour makes promises: a new council house building programme, more money for community care, more money for roads and pavements, more for teachers, better schools, extra equipment, new capital expenditure, leisure centres and sports facilities—and all of this to be funded without a general increase in taxation.

Labour's deputy leader has been saying to the councils, "You may not get as much as you want, but you will certainly get more." This is a deeply cynical exercise in uncosted but attractive promises. It is not so much a programme to improve services as a Labour gimmick to gain votes.

9.22 pm

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has just done a first-rate job on behalf of the Labour party. We congratulate him on spelling out the good things that we shall be offering. We also pledge that when we are drawing up the membership of the commission we shall take into account his earlier suggestions about widening the membership. We shall even consider him in whatever new role he has at the time.

If ever there was a wolf in sheep's clothing this Bill is it. It pretends to be about local government when it is nothing of the sort. It pretends to be in favour of the user, the customer, although it does not mention quality at all. That being the case, we are right to ask what the Bill's objectives really are. Clearly, they have nothing to do with extending local democracy or with bringing local government closer to the people or about accountability. They are not even about the accessibility of services, and they are certainly not about the development of economic and social policies—something that is so often ignored in the scramble to fragment and disintegrate what was built up over the last century by local government people of all political persuasions. It is certainly not about quality, and it is not about service. The words "public service" are, and for the past 13 years have been, anathema to Conservative Members.

The content of the Bill, despite its presentation in this House and in another place as being innocuous, is, in fact, a reflection of the views of the No Turning Back group of Conservative Members. Unlike the council tax legislation, its provisions can be embraced with genuine enthusiasm by the Minister of State. Instead of having to stand on his head, he is runing hard and pushing his shoulder to the wheel because, of course, he is a member of the No Turning Back group. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Hon. Members who are shouting "Hear, hear" indicate the support that the No Turning Back group commands in this debate and in the Conservative party. Members of the Conservative party were nurtured—nay, bottled—on the heady milk of Margaret Thatcher's version of Conservatism. The pamphlet "Choice and Responsibility", which was supported by the Minister of State, spelt it out. It said:

> "Local authorities, like central Government, should become enablers rather than providers . . . Compulsory competitive tendering should be progressively phased out and replaced by compulsory private tendering . . . Only public health, civil defence and local amenities need to remain an integral part of local government."

That is the agenda of the No Turning Back group. That is what it stands for and that is what the Bill embodies.

Part I, which deals with the tendering process, makes the values clear. Instead of what we would consider to be a reasonable programme for the provision of services, and an increase in control by local people over such provision by holding to account those whom they elect, we have the Conservative party slogans of privatise, centralise and neutralise. Cost, not quality, ideology not competence, delivery for profit rather than service for people—those are the slogans that we have had from this regime. Those who read the Bill, the comments in press releases and the local government commission's guidelines will be able to see that.

The Secretary of State talked about cost, economy, efficiency and effectiveness but not about quality or service. If the Conservative Government were serious about a genuine effort to reach a consensus about the way in which we should mirror what is taking place in the rest of Europe—east, central and west—and in the United States and Canada with the devolving and decentralisation of services, we should be happy to reach an agreement with them. What is needed is not compulsion or dictation from the centre but people working together in the best interests of their local community.

Interestingly, the message spelt out by the ideological right in the United States is rejected by the ideological right in Britain. While they both preach the supremacy of the market and the inalienable rights of the private sector, the Americans preach a pragmatism in the provision of local services. More importantly, they advocate removing the overwhelming power of the central state to dictate, and leaving states, counties and cities to decide matters for themselves. That message is being fought within the Republican party between Pat Buchanan and George Bush.

Here, we have a strange, enforced market economy. If a local authority wins a tender, the Government try to take it away. They invent strange reasons for doing so, saying that it has used anti-competitive practices. One cannot expect the Government to accept European Community

rules about the "economically advantageous" projects that should be accepted when any scheme goes out to private tender but one can expect consistency. Three times in the House of Lords spokesmen contradicted themselves when asked whether that phrase should be applied.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said, the spokesmen got themselves into an even bigger twist over the question whether cost should be the primary basis on which to judge a contract, or whether then to introduce another element so as to ensure that white collar services can be won by the private sector. In other words, they have an enveloping scheme under which there has to be a basic threshold over which people must pass before getting into the realms of simply accepting the lowest possible tender.

All of the contradiction comes because when the citizens charter was announced and the Prime Minister increased the costs of the Cabinet Office by £800,000 to pay for the work to be done on it, bringing the cost of the Cabinet Office to £22·5 million, it was announced that the PA consultancy report had been commissioned. At paragraph 1.4, the report states:

"It can be argued (and indeed many of our case study authorities did argue) that, given the problems with the application of CCT in the corporate service sector described above and the current existence of strong pressures to reduce central costs (described in section 2), it is neither desirable nor necessary to extend CCT into this sector at all. There is some substance to that argument."

The PA report was supposed to justify the Government's programme and ensure that they could press ahead with what they wanted to do. Every professional body that had been consulted has rejected the programme and the proposals attaching to it. The winner of the Queen's gold award for the best architectural projects of the year, Mr. Stansfield Smith—for Hampshire county council schools as it happens, an authority that is proud of local provision by an in-house organisation—has described the programme as being as much about "cheap politics as about cheap buildings".

He referred also to cheap tendering. My right hon. and hon. Friends could not describe it any more succinctly than that.

The programme is intended to ensure that people can make profit out of public service rather than to achieve the goals that we see as important for ourselves. We, the Opposition, do not have only those who are in public service to support what we believe to be right. We have, for instance, the former comptroller of the Audit Commission, the new chairman of the local government commission, John Banham. At the conference of the Institute of Housing at Harrogate in 1985, Mr. Banham praised the authority of the city of which I had the privilege to be leader, describing it as the most efficient authority in Britain.

Mr. Portillo: He did not always do that.

Mr. Blunkett: I think that once was enough, Mr. Banham said that Sheffield was a shining example. He added—this is the importance of the statement—that privatisation was the last resort of a management which had given up. That is about the ticket.

There are local government officers who are engaged in management buy-outs and others who decide to work in the private sector and pretend that they can deliver services better while being paid more than in the public sector. Alternatively, they can get some rewards from shareholdings. We have Whitewater Leisure, Contemporary Leisure and all the controversy about those who used to work for the Glasgow authority. They go off and tell untruths about the organisations for which they are working—in fact, downright lies—or for which they worked. I shall say that outside the House if there is anyone who is worried about privilege.

The examples that I have given show that there is a fundamental myth, which is that public service is incompetent and that the private sector is always right. It is not always in the right and we know that it is not. We know, for instance, that 76 per cent. of the services that have been put out to tender have been won in-house despite the fact that in-house organisations cannot develop the capital investment and lease equipment in the same way as the private sector. Everything that they borrow has to be put against basic credit approvals. They are bound and gagged when it comes to extending services by engaging in competition with the private sector outside the local authority.

Some of us were interested to hear the Secretary of State espousing or advocating cross-boundary tendering. I say to the hon. Member for Harrow, West that I think that the right hon. Gentleman's words will have reached the chairman of the Audit Commission. They might even have reached the legal officer, Mr. Tony Child. If that has happened, his view will change overnight. I hope so, because it would be nice to integrate—to subsume—the Audit Commission, in an orderly fashion, into our quality commission. That would provide quality for people and ensure that league tables mean what they should mean, which is a comparison of the delivery of services to people. They should show, for example, how many home helps per thousand of the population are being provided. They should show up Tory authorities for not providing nursery provision. It is 20 years since the previous Prime Minister, when she was Secretary of State for Education, promised universal nursery education for all three to five-year-olds whose parents desired it. Promises fulfilled—people standing on their heads by the dozen.

I shall cite one league table comparison that might be worth considering. Earlier today the Secretary of State chided me and said that in some way I was an advocate of his system because I used the example of refuse collection and its cost to show that his system was simple and that we were in agreement on it. He should ask Chiltern, the Buckinghamshire district that I quoted, and whose refuse collection costs a great deal, why that should be so. It is because collecting the refuse of houses in close proximity, such as terraced houses in the city of Sheffield, costs only one third of what it costs to collect the refuse of houses in the posh south-west of Sheffield, where the houses are spaced out and the collection men have to walk up long drives. In Sheffield, householders do not have to carry refuse to the end of their drives—how do we construct league tables to reflect that?

Conservative Members might like to think about the league table that I am about to cite. The Secretary of State for Education and Science is keen on people reading books. We are all keen on that. I am desperately in favour of my children learning to read books. What about the number of books issued? I am not referring to *The Sunday Times* cocked-up, distorted version, which CIPFA denounced after it had been printed. I shall give the figures for the number of library books issued per hundred of the

[Mr. Blunkett]

population across a sample of authorities. For Manchester, it is 537. Who controls Manchester? It is Labour. For Hammersmith and Fulham, the figure is 382; for Lewisham, 371; for Merton, 366; for Greenwich, 346; and for Islington, 345.

For Suffolk—a Tory authority—the figure is 129. It could manage only just over one book per person per year. For Berkshire, it is 134; for East Sussex, 149; for Cornwall, 153; and for West Sussex, 167. What a fantastically literate lot they are in Tory authorities. People talk about reading and about literacy, but they do not spend the money to enable people to achieve that. The Labour party believes in service and in spending money wisely on providing that service. We believe in a local government structure and a set of functions that enable that to happen.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) found himself in an interesting ideological twist on whether function or structure came first. He denounced function as an irrelevance and said that we needed to set up a structure. Presumably, we could invent anything that we liked. Local government could meet in a telephone box because function is not important. However, we all know that it is important and that it is the driving force of structure. We need the right finance and the right structure, but above all we need the right objectives. We need to know what we are setting out and why. We need to know the principles behind what we are doing.

If we believe, and many of us do, in unitary local government—one door to knock on and one set of people to hold to account—we must give them something to do other than riding around in a civic car pretending that they are important and delivering nothing, responsive to no demands, not aspiring to change and improvement, and not even doing what the Conservatives of old did in the Chamberlain era when there was the sort of socialism that is now anathema to the Tory party. Instead, according to the Tory party, and as spelt out in the guidelines to the commission, we have a structure that accords with the aims of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). He is ill, and I hope that he is now improving. In one of his speeches, the right hon. Gentleman spoke of a council that met once a year to put out contracts, had a good lunch and then went home. I am sure that all Conservative Members are in favour of a good lunch; but it simply will not do.

Let me spell out what the commission's report is supposed to do. The guidelines do not talk about developing a structure that is crucial to the quality delivery of services. This is what they say about housing:

"Authorities also own and manage 4 million houses nationally."

Referring to assessment and monitoring, the guidelines continue:

"Their role in these areas of housing will be passed over to housing associations and the private sector."

They speak of opting out in the primary, secondary and further education sectors; as for social services, they speak of monitoring and enabling rather than providing. Every part of appendix A talks about disabling local government, rather than enabling it to perform.

We offer something very different. We offer a decent finance system that can sustain the functions that we give to local government, and a structure that is not piecemeal, but is based on identifiable communities—that is geared not to numbers alone, but to the ability to provide a decent level of service.

What the Bill offers is not local, nor is it government. It is dictation from the centre; it is administration rather than government. What is not privatised will be centralised. All that the Bill contains, and the ideology behind it—the values and principles that it espouses—must be rejected tonight in favour of genuine local democracy, and a Labour Government who will implement real policies for the people whom we represent.

9.41 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): I thank the many Conservative Members who have spoken so well in support of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), who is one of the most thoughtful Members of the House in this context, described it as historic. It is indeed historic, not because reforms of local government have not taken place before—they have done so often—but because it offers a reform of the structure of local government. That structure can now be diverse, based on local choices, and it can place tremendous emphasis on community identity. Different solutions can be adopted in different places, solutions that are suited to the different needs of different people. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) was particularly strong on that point.

It struck me as extraordinary that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) should attack us on that point. To him, the idea of different solutions in different places seemed untidy—chaotic, he said. It did not meet the socialist ideal of being able to impose the same solution from Whitehall on every part of England. It appears that, over the past 20 years, the hon. Gentleman has slept soundly. The Labour party has learnt nothing about the deep-seated wish of the British people for local government structures that reflect what they feel about their local communities, and units of government that mean something to them and are not imposed on them.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Portillo: I am sorry; I will not give way.

Something very funny must have happened to the hon. Member for Dagenham on his way to the Chamber. Last year, when the Government announced the proposals, Labour appeared to be in favour of the reform of local government structure and the establishment of a local government commission. The hon. Member for Dagenham must have been speaking out of turn at that time; he has certainly been nobbled since.

It may well be that the policy was agreed by the shadow Cabinet, but some chance remark made by the Leader of the Opposition at Luigi's restaurant threw the whole thing into disarray. The Labour party is certainly in opposition now. I am not sure whether I am more appalled at the prospect of the Labour party being in government than I am at the prospect of having the support of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) and the Liberal party.

Diversity is the point of the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Sir A. Durant) said, backed up so eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for

Southend, West (Mr. Channon), we do not want this reform to result in lines being drawn on a map that will be imposed upon people. There is no need for a minimum size. There is no Whitehall model that could embrace the Isles of Scilly and the demands of Yorkshire. There is no reason, as the right hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Oakes) and the hon. Member for Eastbourne were concerned to know, to presume the need for joint authorities.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West asked me a number of specific questions. The chairman-designate of the local government commission, Sir John Banham, is in place. I hope that soon, bearing in mind what my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said, we shall make more appointments to the shadow commission so that the commissioners can begin to plan their work in order that the commission can start its work shortly after Royal Assent. The Bill specifies a maximum of 15 commissioners. That number is enough to operate on a regional basis.

It should be possible for the local government commission to consider four or five different areas throughout England at any one time. The areas will differ in size. I believe that the smallest area that will be considered by the commission at any one time will be a county, with the possible exception of certain islands. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West said, it may be appropriate in some cases to consider a group of counties if clear cross-boundary issues are likely to arise during the discussion period.

The order in which we put the various parts of England under the local government commission's microscope will be for the Government to decide. It will take some years to complete that process, but that is a necessary price to pay for the flexibility that the legislation gives us. It enables us to tailor our solutions to suit the needs of different places.

We are predisposed towards unitary authorities. We believe that there are strong arguments in favour of unitary authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) spoke eloquently about them in general and about how they would apply in his particular case. When there are two tiers of local authority, people tend to become confused about who is doing what. Accountability suffers. People do not know which authority they are paying for particular services. It leads people to believe that there is excessive bureaucracy and overlap and the potential for waste. We do not want to be dogmatic. When he spoke about north Yorkshire, my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) said that it would be unwise for any Government to impose the same pattern on every part of England because the differences between one part of the country and another are so great.

At the beginning of his speech the hon. Member for Dagenham said that no one disagrees with the Government's wish to introduce simplicity into local government, but the fact is that the Labour party profoundly disagrees with that wish. It wishes to impose an extra tier of regional government upon the country. It does not matter to the Labour party that the regions are unpopular, or that they cannot be afforded, or that they are unwanted. The Labour party still favours introducing another layer of government, imposing it upon the people of this country and raising taxes to pay for it.

What clearly are wanted are the links that people cherish with their traditional counties. Even if the units of government are not based upon the counties, people still hark back to the links that they had with the traditional counties. They are still keen on those links. There is no reason why the traditional counties should not emerge as part of the process, even if they are counties that have no administrative functions in certain places. *[Laughter.]* The Opposition laugh at their peril. It matters very much indeed to the people of Wirral whether they live in Cheshire or Merseyside. It matters very much to the people of Coventry whether they live in Warwickshire or in the west midlands. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) is in his place. It matters a lot to many people in Bolton whether they live in Manchester or Lancashire. Many of my constituents are deeply concerned about Middlesex.

To the people of England, it is more than a question of who administers local government: the lines on the map, the cricket teams, the Lords Lieutenants and signposts are important. To the Labour party, they are untidy matters, which is why it not only opposes these changes but laughs when they are mentioned.

The hon. Member for Dagenham wants not only to recreate a GLC but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West said, for it to be bigger and for it to control the police, which the old GLC never did. He warned us that we would pay the price. He said that a Labour Government would create a new GLC. Labour will pay the price: there will be no Labour Government because of the London effect. Once again, we shall win marginal seats in Lambeth, Haringey, Lewisham and Waltham Forest, where people are fed up with Labour government. We shall win in Brent and Ealing, where we have already turfed out the Labour party, and marginal seats in Wandsworth and Westminster, where people have seen the benefits of Conservative government. The London effect will again work in favour of the Government. One has only to look around to see Labour government in action in London.

I appreciate the courtesy of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in giving notice of the details that he wanted to raise. We shall address those points in Committee, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I will be happy to deal with them in correspondence. However, it would be unrealistic to do so in replying to the debate. We have sought evidence that the de minimis rule is inappropriate. In England, no such evidence has come forward, but it is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to decide whether he is convinced by the evidence.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow raised a number of other important issues that we shall want to consider in Committee and, I hope, in response to consultation.

Mr. Dalyell: Will there be a decision on de minimis fairly soon?

Mr. Portillo: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, who will have noted the points that the hon. Gentleman made.

The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) mentioned the fire service. I do not share his view that it is inappropriate for it to be excluded from compulsory competitive tendering. None the less, we are in a consultation period and the Home Secretary will want to take account of all the points that are made to him. As the hon. Gentleman said, the opinions of chief fire officers will obviously weigh with the Government.

[Mr. Portillo]

There has been a change in the approach of local government to compulsory competitive tendering, but it appears to have been lost on the Labour party. Local government is anxious to provide better value, to improve management, and to seek competitive bids for many of the services that it provides. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I received representations from local authorities about their standard spending assessments. Hardly a single Labour or Conservative-controlled authority failed to mention the strides that they are making in improving the competitiveness of services and in putting services out to competition.

The Labour party is almost alone in the world in questioning the benefits of competitive tendering. My hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West and my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West gave good examples of the way in which it is improving services. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) made an eloquent speech about compulsory competitive tendering; and I was heartened by the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) also realised that we were talking not about compulsory contracting out but about compulsory competitive tendering, which means that there is an opportunity for the in-house team to make a bid.

Many local authorities have moved ahead and are putting many of their services out to competitive tender. They are already investigating the scope for putting some more services—management services, computer services and the collection of moneys—out to the private sector. In compulsory competitive tendering the Government are merely bringing up the rear and ensuring that local authorities that have not yet taken advantage of those techniques are brought up to the level of the best.

How the House will have valued yet another statement from the hon. Member for Dagenham, this one to the effect that he would do something only in extremis. On this occasion, he said that if he were Secretary of State he would introduce compulsory competitive tendering only in extremis. That is yet another case of the hon. Gentleman not being able to make up his mind about his policies and he must therefore reserve the right to do precisely what is Government policy.

I thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East was extremely eloquent about the importance of levelling the playing field between the private and public sectors. There have been far too many cases of abuse in which local authorities have contrived a system of competitive tendering under which only the direct service organisation could win because special conditions were imposed. Those practices must be brought to an end, and I know that my hon. Friends will strongly support the Government when we say that enough is enough and that if we are to have a compulsory competitive tendering regime, it must be one under which the private and public sectors are able to compete with absolute equality.

The hon. Member for Dagenham said that the citizens charter had been ineffective, but how wrong he was. Here we are, just a few months after the announcement of the citizens charter, legislating to improve the services provided to citizens. We are already halfway through a Bill which is a major step forward in that respect, and it is breath-taking nonsense for the hon. Gentlemen to suggest that Labour authorities were pioneers in the provision of better services to their constituents. We know that Labour authorities in London and throughout the country have become bywords for poor and expensive services, for litter-ridden streets, for badly-managed housing estates, for miserable conditions and for high levels of taxation.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) raised the question of how much it cost to collect a tonne of rubbish in one place as opposed to another. It is expensive in Wandsworth because the streets are swept every day. I suspect that it would be cheaper to collect a tonne of rubbish in Lambeth on the basis of an annual sweep of the streets because, to pick up a tonne of rubbish there, one would hardly have to stir from the spot. That is the experience of many people living in Lambeth. We shall introduce a system of measurements so that people in different local authority areas will know precisely to what standard their local services are being provided.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) criticised the Government for not slavishly following the advice given by consultants. In this Government it is the Ministers who decide on policy, not the consultants. It gave us a good insight into a Labour Government. A Labour Government would bear the impression that the last consultant laid upon them. The Opposition have no philosophy of their own. Presumably, they would set out on one course of action, receive a consultants' report which would blow them off their course, the journalists would then be summoned to Luigi's restaurant and policy would once again be changed.

Labour is offering to people who are presently enjoying the benefits of compulsory competitive tendering a promise to scrap it. It offers to those who demand quality the abolition of the Audit Commission, something to which it is pledged. Labour offers to all those who want simpler local government a new tier of expensive regional government.

We offer higher quality services brought about by competition, we offer better information to the public about the standards of service which they will receive, and we offer to reform local government to reflect wishes and natural communities. For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 221.

Division No. 43] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter

Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder V)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Aspinwall, Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek

Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL *[LORDS]* *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Local Government Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any sums required by the Secretary of State for—
  (i) paying to the Local Government Commission for England established under that Act amounts required by that Commission for carrying out its functions;
  (ii) paying compensation to persons who cease, under that Act, to hold office as members of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England; or
  (iii) meeting expenses incurred by a staff commission established by an order under that Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Stamp Duty (Temporary Provisions) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

10.15 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Just before the Christmas recess, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made a statement announcing a package of measures designed to help with the problem of mortgage arrears and repossessions and to stimulate the housing market generally. The Bill gives effect to one aspect of my right hon. Friend's package—his proposals to increase the stamp duty threshold from £30,000 to £250,000 for eight months starting from 20 December last year. We debated last week the resolution that founds the Bill.

This is a short Bill. Clause 1 lifts the stamp duty threshold for purchases of land and buildings up to £250,000, applying to documents executed between 20 December last year and 19 August 1992. Clause 2 provides a procedure for giving refunds where documents have been executed since 20 December 1991 and stamped before 16 January, the date the resolution took effect.

Stamp duty on property transactions runs at 1 per cent. of the purchase price, and it applies to all transactions above the threshold. During the eight-month moratorium, about 90 per cent. of private house purchases—about 600,000 transactions—will not bear stamp duty. That means that housebuyers, the people who generally pay the charge, will be able to save up to £2,500 on the cost of a house. For someone buying the average-priced house, it means a very useful saving of £600.

The purpose of the measure is to encourage people considering buying homes to get on with buying their houses or flats and to prompt others to bring forward their purchases to take advantage of the moratorium. That is why the threshold is lifted for only eight months; on 20 August it will go back to £30,000.

It will, of course, be a little while before the effects of the measure show up in the levels of house sales. It takes time to decide on the right house and to go through the formalities of buying, so it would be nonsensical to argue, as some have sought to do already, that the measure has failed. It is far too early to see its effects, but the measure has been very widely welcomed by the Council of Mortgage Lenders, the House Builders Federation and many others as a helpful spur to a depressed housing market.

The cost of the measure to the Exchequer will be about £110 million in the current financial year, and £310 million in 1992-93. As my right hon. Friend said in his statement, that cost will be met out of the public sector borrowing requirement saving of £1 billion from deferring the abolition of stamp duty on shares.

Over the coming months, the measure will mean that many thousands of people will pay less to buy their new homes because they will not have to pay stamp duty. I am sure that it will encourage and facilitate house purchasers and so provide a real stimulus to the housing market. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.19 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): In the eight or nine years that I have been a Member of the House, I have not heard any Minister make a Second Reading speech as short as that which has just been made by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. It sounded as though it was being read from a prepared script. Indeed, I seemed to recognise in it large sections of the press release issued on 19 December.

The Financial Secretary gave no explanation of why the Bill is suddenly necessary. He gave no reason for the Government suddenly being able to find £400 million, although the press release said something about where the money has come from. He gave no reasons for why the Government have chosen to spend that money in this way.

It was a pity that the Financial Secretary's speech took such a short time because that means that the Opposition will have to pursue the Bill just that little bit further than normal because we want to ensure that the Government are acting properly and to ascertain their intentions. As I do not know the Government's intentions from the Financial Secretary's speech, I shall have to think of some myself.

I begin by asking whether the Bill will reduce homelessness. This country has a housing crisis and homeless people. I know that several of my hon. Friends will seek to address that topic if they catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. Homelessness will not be affected by the Bill. People will continue to be homeless. I must also ask whether the Bill will stop houses being repossessed. It may help a little if, as a result, the lenders—the building societies and the banks—are a little less keen to repossess. I should have liked the Financial Secretary to comment on that but, unfortunately, he did not. However, I do not think that the Bill will help to alleviate the problem of repossessions. The Bill will not rescue those who are in arrears with their mortgage interest payments—not a bit of it. It will not lower interest rates. Furthermore, it will not extend housing benefit to people in difficulties.

The Government could have addressed all those issues. If they could not make provision for them all in this Bill, at least we might have expected to hear from the Financial Secretary why all those important and serious matters, such as homelessness and people's difficulty in repaying their mortgage at a time of very high interest rates, were not included in the Bill and why the Government did not take action. Of course, it is a question not of a Government who cannot take action, but of a Government who will not take action.

The Bill contains one major provision—that stamp duty will be relieved for about eight months. That means that for eight months those who would normally have paid 1 per cent. stamp duty when buying a property priced between £30,000 and £250,000 will not now have to do so.

The Bill is supposed to kick-start the market. The Government have come up with this solution and are taking up the time of the House to debate kick-starting the market by a Bill that will ease stamp duty payments. It is a great pity that the Government have done that and that they did not seek instead to introduce a Bill to increase manufacturing because that might have increased trade between this country and other European Community member states. The Government could have introduced a Bill to increase employment. All those measures would have given a kick-start to what the Government desire —a better "feel good" factor before they have to face the electorate at the polls. If manufacturing was increased, more people would be in work, paying taxes and have disposable income to spend. More people would "feel good". The same effect would be created if trade or employment were increased. But that is not what the

[Dr. John Marek]

Government have done. That shows the serious difference between the Conservative party and the Opposition. The Conservative party is playing politics. It is not interested in tackling the root causes of our decline during the past 10 years or our economic problems.

The Conservatives have a one-club solution to our economic problems. Interest rates must be high enough to ensure that inflation is low enough. The Opposition take the diametrically opposite view. One club is not enough. Of course, inflation must be low for prosperity. But high interest rates are not good for prosperity. There are ways of increasing manufacturing, trade and employment. The Government could have introduced a Bill to tackle those issues. They have not done so because the Tory philosophy is built on the market.

The Tories believe that the market must not be meddled with but left to its own devices. But unfortunately the market does not make anything. It does not export anything. The market is greedy and does not take account of the well-being of the economy of the United Kingdom. It is not in the interests of the market to do so. That is indisputable.

It has been the Tory philosophy to leave the market entirely alone, yet with this Bill they are interfering in the market. If they were true to their philosophy and left the market strictly alone, the Bill would not be before us tonight. They would have said that the housing market was of no concern to them. It would be of no concern to them if citizens of Britain who bought houses three or four years ago when interest rates were low had a cross to bear when interest rates suddenly and catastrophically doubled.

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): The hon. Gentleman knows my constituency well. There is a great deal of anxiety there about repossession of homes. The number of homes repossessed last year was 100 per cent. up on the figure for five years ago. There is a great deal of anxiety about repossessions, whatever views the Government hold on the issue.

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. It is true that there is a great deal of anxiety about repossessions. I shall seek to persuade the House that the Bill will do nothing or very little to alleviate the problem of repossessions that we are suffering at present.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The Minister has not taken a blind bit of notice of what my hon. Friend has been saying about what the Government could and should do. I think that he is going to listen now. It is the obvious thing that my hon. Friend should say straightforwardly to the Minister that the Bill is a racket. It is a quick fix job because we are coming up to an election. The Government hope that they can catch one or two votes because they know what the position will be when the election is called. The Bill is a fix and a racket. That is what the Government stand for as far as the electorate out there is concerned.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend puts the point succinctly and straightforwardly. Of course, his argument hits at the heart of the matter and at the Government's policies. I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind if I delve into Government policy a little further to pin round their necks the policy that they seek to put through the House of Commons. It is, of course, a racket, a gimmick, and they hope that they will be able to reimpose the tax as soon as the election is over.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Rubbish.

Mr. Marek: It is not rubbish.

One amendment is designed explicitly and purely to help the Conservative party. I shall not deal with it at the moment save to say that it is the one that changes from 20 August to 7 May the date on which stamp duty becomes payable again. Of course it would be very helpful to the Conservative party if there were a great many transactions on 5 and 6 May to make it appear that the market had been kick-started. However, I shall explore that matter later. At this stage my theme is that this is an election gimmick. The Conservative party would not have found this money in a million Sundays if it had not been for the fact that there must be an election by a date in July.

Tory philosophy has been to leave the market alone, yet here the Government are interfering. The reason, of course, is that the election is coming and they want the "feel good" factor to operate in their favour. To emphasise that point I should like to quote from the research note that was produced by the Library on 15 January. On page 5 the note says:

"The main reason why the Government wants to act is that economists now generally accept that that there is a strong link between the housing market and general consumer wealth effects. Put simply, the price of our houses and, perhaps more importantly, the rate at which it is increasing or decreasing, affects how we, as consumers, spend our money."

The Library is always very careful not to take one side —either the Government's side or the Opposition's side —in any argument in this House. Here, however, it says quite clearly that

"there is a strong link between the housing market and general consumer wealth effects."

That is a very telling statement and amounts to a very strong indication of the Government's reason for introducing this Bill. The Library's research note goes on to quote the Bank of England's quarterly bulletin of February 1990. Four effects are noted. The first is:

"A buoyant house market stimulates considerable purchases of related consumer durables. This is outside the scope of this note, but it is not insignificant in its own right."

The second point that the bulletin makes is this:

"Rising capital values . . . leads to an increase in net cash withdrawals. This is mainly effected by bequests and is . . . [an] increasingly common feature of consumers' lifetime income profile following the death of the first generation of home owners on a large scale."

That is further support for my proposition as to the reasons for the introduction of this Bill. This is the bulletin's third point:

"Work was done on 'equity release', the extent to which homeowners manage to release some of the capital that they had in their home either during continued occupation or when they exchanged residences. Although 'equity release' was positively related to buoyant market conditions it was not a significant macro-economic phenomenon."

Making the fourth point, the bulletin says:

"The Bank found that rising capital values influenced consumers' decisions about saving."

And this is important:

"Rising prices persuaded individuals to reduce their savings held in other, more liquid forms."

This is what happened three, four, five years ago when we had the last housing market boom. House prices were rising, and home owners were persuaded to part with their savings. The Government think that this move will have

the same effect, that it will kick-start the economy and, miraculously, people will forget what happened three or four years ago and will start spending. I have news for the Government: people are not that stupid, and they will not be fooled twice.

Those comments, from the Library and the Bank of England, are not the only ones. One can adduce a further piece of evidence from the *Financial Times*. I could paraphrase this, but one should always give the source of one's information, and there has been quite a bit of press comment about the Bill and whether it will work. When it was announced before Christmas, the *Financial Times* reported:

"In the City, there was scepticism about the effects of cutting stamp duty and speculation that the eight-month period was deliberately timed to coincide with the run-up to the next general election."

It does not take much to divine that. Mr. John Wrigglesworth, an analyst at UBS Phillips and Drew, said:

"We saw in 1988 what a deadline concession does to the market, and a 1 per cent. cut in a falling market does not mean much."

There is then the problem of what will happen in the three or four months after 19 August. The *Financial Times* was right to highlight the problem of going for a Bill that will give a relaxation that will be abruptly cut off on 19 August. I shall not dwell on this now, but we may be able to discuss what will happen after 19 August when we deal with an amendment later. I give notice to the Financial Secretary that I should like to hear, as I am sure that the House would like to hear, a little more about what he thinks will happen after 19 August if the House sees fit to pass the Bill.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Gentleman says on the one hand that this is an insignificant measure that will have no effect on the housing market, and then on the other that it is so significant that it will affect decisions about whether people buy or sell before 19 August. Which is it—significant or insignificant?

Dr. Marek: We can explore this later. The *Financial Times* and other commentators have expressed considerable doubt as to whether this move will have a significant effect on the Government's aim of kick-starting the economy. On the other hand, such house purchases as are made will be concentrated in the period up to 19 August. After that, nothing will happen in the market. It is a bit of both. I do not think that it will be effective, but to the extent that it is effective, it will distort the market.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): When we debated the Ways and Means resolutions that were the legislative underpinning for this Bill, the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate), a Conservative Member of Parliament, made the very point that my hon. Friend has just made—that the Bill will be a disincentive against entering the housing market after its provisions end. He pleaded with the Government to assure him that the cutting of stamp duty would continue after August. Therefore, I was surprised when the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) stabbed one of his hon. Friends in the back, and made such sneering remarks.

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend must know what the Conservative party is like. It does not surprise me. The record will show the truth of the matter.

There was further press comment after Christmas. As I am sure that hon. Members would like to know the source of the article to which I shall refer, I shall not paraphrase. The article appeared in *The Guardian* on 4 January and was written by Simon Beavis, the business correspondent. It reads:

"The Government's decision to suspend stamp duty payments on housing transactions will do nothing to revive house prices or housebuilding before 1993, a leading construction industry chief said, yesterday.

This would make the present downturn in the housing market one of the longest on record, John Smith, chairman of the Building Employers' Confederation, said.

The depressed construction sector saw no prospect of recovery this year even if the economy as a whole began to improve. Despite a rise in new housing starts in the third quarter of 1991, 'the housing market as a whole shows no sign of real revival', he said."

An eminent person who is involved in the construction industry is saying that the Bill will not help it. I have already said that it will not help manufacturing, trade or employment. It will not help either anyone who has had his house repossessed or someone who is in mortgage difficulties. If the article is right, it will not help anybody in the construction industry. The article continues:

"His bleak assessment coincided with the new poll by Gallup for Gartmore, the investment management group, which found that one in five people are waiting until after the election before moving home. Four out of 10 thought that the recession would not end before 1993."

Even the Prime Minister is hedging his bets now and thinking that it might not end until 1993.

When commenting on the eight-month abolition of stamp duty, Mr. Smith, who is the chairman of the Building Employers Confederation, said that

"the new measures introduced to stem repossessions would help to reduce the stock of unsold new houses, but did not go far enough. 'It will be 1993 before we see any real recovery in house prices and housebuilding.'"

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): One of the problems with the present level of house prices is that many people have a house that would sell for less than the mortgage which is attached to it. If such a person sold his house he would still be indebted, and possibly considerably. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have not addressed that problem in terms of the Bill and, indeed, have not given any consideration to the people who are in the plight that I have described?

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that he will seek to catch your eye later in the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with a view to advancing those arguments. There is nothing in the Bill from which anyone in difficulties can take consolation.

The Government have a large majority in the House, although they obtained only 42 per cent. of the vote in 1987, and I do not fancy my chances, along with my right hon. and hon. Friends, of beating them, in trying to improve the Bill or in adding to it measures that would make the Bill more acceptable and protect those who are in difficulties with their mortgage arrears or who have had their homes repossessed. We shall, however, have to wait and see.

The green shoots of the economy have, unfortunately, been frozen off. The plant was left outside in the back garden and the frost has got it. That is being admitted by the Government, including the Prime Minister. There are many glum faces among Members on the Government Benches.

Mr. Maude: That is because they are listening to the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Marek: Indeed. They are hearing and agreeing with the veracity of my remarks.

There is no recovery in sight, and any recovery that there may be will be spasmodic and minor. The Government, typically, have not produced a Bill that will get the economy back into shape by kick-starting it. They are trying to kick-start a spurious housing market to try to create a consumer boom, to make people think that they are wealthy and to make them feel good so that they can win the election. It is all about the election and gimmickry; it is not about good government and it is certainly not about consideration for those who have housing difficulties.

I remind the House that this change in Government policy is not the only one. The Prime Minister, when he was a social security Minister, cut mortgage support from 100 per cent. to 50 per cent. for the first six months for people who had to live on benefit either because they had been made redundant or because they had become unemployed. Indeed, when the right hon. Gentleman introduced the measure five years ago he boasted about it. He said that there was too much support for housing. Now, the Government have come round full circle. Suddenly, the reality of an election is before them and they can see the deadline of the buffers only a few yards ahead of them. That is why they are trying to help the housing market in such a peculiar way.

There has been another change in Tory party philosophy recently. Only a year ago, mortgage interest relief at 40 per cent. was withdrawn and restricted to the 30 per cent. tax rate.

Sir William Clark: Twenty-five per cent.

Dr. Marek: I am sorry——

The Minister for Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): A Freudian slip.

Dr. Marek: It was not a Freudian slip. The real rate of taxation under the Tory Government is 25p in the pound plus 9p for national insurance, which makes 34 per cent. Under the last Labour Government, national insurance was only 6·5p in the pound. Value added tax was only 8 per cent., but under the Tories it is now 17·5 per cent. Under Labour, the burden of taxation was about 34 per cent.; under the Tories, it is 37 per cent. I do not need any lectures on who is the high taxing party—it is the Tories —*[Laughter.]* They may laugh, but let them challenge what I am saying. I shall give way to any Tory Member who wishes to do so. The high taxing party is the Tory party. The burden of taxation in the 1980s was always higher than it was in the 1970s. I am waiting for a Tory Member to challenge my figures. Of course, no one will do so—*[Interruption.]* Oh, one will.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman knows that the burden of taxation on present taxpayers rose in the first two years of this Government because the last Labour Government had spread the burden of taxation on to the next generation. We had to unmortgage the country's future, and since then the burden of taxation has steadily fallen.

Dr. Marek: My recollection of events is slightly different. Before 1979, the Conservative party said that it had no proposals to put up value added tax. As soon as it came to office, it almost doubled it, from 8 per cent. to 15 per cent. That was why the burden of taxation shot up between 1979 and 1981. That is a slightly different story.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that the burden of taxation is actually higher under the Tories, but they carefully differentiate between direct and indirect taxation? The combination of the two is much higher under the Tories. The increase in value added tax bears most heavily on the poor as it is a bigger share of their income than it is of the income of the wealthy. Therefore, under the Tories not only has the burden of tax increased overall; it has actually increased more for the poor.

Dr. Marek: There is much in what my hon. Friend says. I do not want to digress too much, but we are talking about taxation: the Bill gives away money and forgoes tax revenue. The Government could have kept that money, or at least given it away in a different manner. Although VAT in this country is not as regressive as it is in other European Community member states, it has certain regressive aspects.

The proportion of our national income that is taken in tax has risen from 34·75 per cent. in 1978-79 to 37 per cent. in 1991-92. In 1978-79, a married couple on typical earnings paid 30·9 per cent. of their income in tax; now, they pay 34·9 per cent. There is no doubt that the burden of taxation has risen, although there may be arguments across the Floor of the House about the reasons for that rise; and the fact is that the Conservatives are the high-tax party.

I cannot argue that, because the Government are giving back a little tax, we should vote against the Bill, and I shall not urge my hon. Friends to oppose its Second Reading —although we retain our right to examine the amendments carefully. None the less, I wish that the Government had presented us with a different Bill, and that the taxation that is being forgone was being forgone in a better way.

It is clear that the Conservative party is rattled, for it has changed its philosophy. At one stage, they say that we should not interfere with the market; at another stage, they say that we should. I think that I have demonstrated that the Bill is an election gimmick, and that after 9 April—or is it 7 May?—it will be speedily forgotten.

Perhaps it is not too late for the Government to propose an adjournment, so that we can return to the Bill next week or at some other time. Perhaps they will change their mind, and incorporate some of our suggestions. Labour's programme is eminently sensible. We propose, for instance, that local authorities be enabled to acquire properties selectively on the private market. Why was not something done? Why was a deal reached quietly, with building societies and banks saying, "We will not go so heavy on repossessions if you—the Government—forgo taxation in the form of stamp duty, and also insist that DSS money is forwarded directly to us rather than being given to home owners"?

Why did not the Bill contain a provision enabling local authorities to acquire properties? Housing associations could and should be encouraged to enter into deals with local authorities enabling them to manage temporary accommodation on authorities' behalf; authorities could be enabled to acquire buildings and convert them into short-stay hostels for homeless people; social landlords could be urged to adopt "living above the shop" initiatives,

which have been pioneered in Cambridge and elsewhere. Local authorities could be encouraged to speed up the letting of their empty properties; the Housing Corporation could monitor the number of empty properties that each Department has, and the information would be passed to the relevant Secretary of State and the National Audit Office. That would exert pressure on Departments to bring their empty properties swiftly into use.

The Bill could have launched a real attack on the appalling state of housing in this country, and on the crisis that we face. Nothing in it, however, remotely suggests that the Government are thinking along those lines, or intend to present the House with another Bill in the future. Local authorities could have a right to acquire derelict private properties. Housing association and local authority homes which are unjustifiably left empty for long periods could be given to other social landlords to be managed more effectively. Moreover, it could be made more cost effective for local authorities to lease decent homes from the private rented sector for use as temporary accommodation.

In addition, there is the Labour party scheme to turn mortgage interest repayments into rent. There would be a part mortgage repayment and a part rent repayment, if people got into difficulties. I understand from my Front Bench Environment colleagues that the Opposition have been talking to the Council of Mortgage Lenders for some time about these matters, yet the Government have not seen fit to do anything positive to try to get round this terrible crisis.

This is an election gimmick proposal. Interest rates are at a record level. In 1979 the Conservative party promised to keep mortgages below 10 per cent. but they have been below 10 per cent. on only one or two occasions. If anybody looks at interest rates under the Labour party in the 1970s and compares them with the interest rates of the Conservative party in the 1980s, he or she will see the great difference between the interest rate policies of the two parties. I have every confidence that after the next election the Labour Government will pursue the same policy of low interest rates.

The number of mortgage repossessions represents an all-time record. Figures provided by the Lord Chancellor's Department show that 33,778 families were served with mortgage repossession orders in the first six months of 1991. The figure for the whole of 1991 will be about 80,000 properties repossessed, yet the Bill does nothing whatsoever to make that figure 77,999 even. Not one house that has been repossessed will be affected by the Bill.

There is a record shortage of affordable housing. More than 1·25 million homes have been sold, yet very few of those homes have been replaced. The total number of homes built by local authorities in 1990 was a mere 13,000 compared with 92,000 in the final year of the last Labour Government.

Finally, we have record levels of homelessness. In 1990, 145,800 households were accepted as homeless by English local authorities, compared with 56,000 in 1979. That is the legacy of 13 years of wasted Conservative Administration: more repossessions, more homelessness, higher interest rates and a disdain about doing anything for the average human being in this country who, through no fault of his or her own but as the result of the Tory party's policies, has suffered the effects of persistent high unemployment. It is a terrible indictment that has not been lost upon the voting public.

The Bill will help none of those unfortunate people. It will not help the economy. It will not kick-start anything, but the Government will, no doubt, continue to kick everything. However, it will not be long before we have a Government who will do something about the current appalling housing crisis. That will be the Labour Government who will take office after the next general election—when this Government dare to call it.

10.58 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The Bill does not address the housing crisis. That does not mean that it ought necessarily to be opposed. I am not clear, having listened to the speech of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), whether the Labour party intends to oppose the Bill. I do not believe that it should be opposed and I intend to say why. Nevertheless, it is a wholly inadequate response to a desperate housing crisis.

The unlocking of council house money that is in council bank accounts—the receipts from council house sales—and the use of a significant part of that money to replace the houses that have been sold and to deal with the homelessness that so many local authorities face would be of considerable benefit to the housing market. A more determined effort to stem the repossessions and to turn mortgages into rents for those for whom a mortgage is no longer a financially viable option would be a significant contribution to the solution of the housing crisis. An attempt to attract private capital into the purchase and building of homes for rent could also make a significant contribution.

The Government have not sought the most cost-effective solution. The use of the business expansion scheme for building houses to rent has not proved a cost-effective means of stimulating the private rented sector. It is important to enlarge that sector, and the Labour party could encourage the investment of substantial capital by making it clear that there will be no wholesale imposition of rent controls.

Mr. Cryer: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Liberal party favours the abolition of rent control so that private landlords can rip off tenants with impunity? That surely is a new aspect of Liberal party policy, on which he might enlarge.

Mr. Beith: I thought the hon. Gentleman might say that. We are not arguing for the removal of the remaining limited rent controls, but I gather from what the hon. Gentleman says that the Labour party favours a return to a wholesale rent control system. On the basis of experience, I tell him that it simply will not work. It would ensure, as it did for many years, that no private capital was invested in rented housing because it would not be possible to obtain a return.

Liberal Democrats do not believe that the private housing sector can meet all our housing needs, but it can make a bigger contribution than it has in recent years. One of the tragedies of the post-war years was that the significant contribution that the private sector made—many people of my age grew up in privately rented housing—was gradually whittled away. Our housing opportunities were only purchase and the then large municipal sector; the options in between were insufficient.

There are now other elements in the equation such as the considerable social housing sector provided by voluntary housing associations, assisted by the Housing Corporation. The market is more complex than before, but the private sector has a significant part to play in the provision of rented housing. It will not play that part if there is a prospect of the wholesale imposition of rent controls. As the housing market is so badly off, the introduction of a potential new purchaser—the private landlord buying or building to rent—would be helpful. It would act as a significant stimulus to the housing market.

All those measures would have a more significant effect on the housing market than will the Bill, which is unlikely to make much difference, because houses are being sold for thousands of pounds less than people paid for them or the price at which they were valued 12 or 18 months ago. A difference of £600 on an average price house may be helpful and welcome to purchasers, but it is unlikely to generate more sales than a price drop of £5,000.

I am sceptical about the impact of the Bill. The Government are using the windfall gain of stamp duty revenue that would have been forgone if the stock exchange had been ready with its new transactions system for the abolition of stamp duty on share transactions.

I do not like stamp duty; I would rather get rid of it altogether. However, it is not top of my list for tax reforms or the removal of taxes. I would rather get rid of the poll tax, the council tax or even the 17·5 per cent. rate of VAT, which seems a particularly heavy burden on the pressed consumer market. I would not argue for the permanent retention of stamp duty on housing transactions, especially as we have got rid of it for so many other transactions.

We are not even considering a measure based on the belief that stamp duty should go, because it is to be reimposed on 20 August this year. It is a piece of temporary fiscal fine-tuning and the Government are not supposed to be in favour of fiscal fine-tuning. Ministers are always telling us what a bad thing it is, but I see no reason why we should not give it a go and discover whether it will have a beneficial effect on the housing market.

There will be some concern and opposition on 20 August when the duty is reimposed, but, as the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) rightly said, the extent of the anguish will be in direct proportion to its significance to the housing market in the meantime. I assume that it will not be that great, but that it will be welcome to those who are able to benefit from it because they are able to manage a house purchase during that period. Those who buy a house after 20 August will feel considerably aggrieved that they have not been able to benefit. The Government will not gain much popularity, but by then it will all be over so they will not be very worried. They may be sitting on the Opposition Benches by then and it will have long ceased to be a matter of concern to them.

I do not think that the limited nature of the Bill or its temporary character is any reason why hon. Members should want to march enthusiastically into the Lobbies and deprive potential beneficiaries of the short-term ability to purchase a house without the imposition of stamp duty. The duty is an irritant to many people, and many buyers—especially first-time buyers—feel that it is a tax that they should not have to bear. Such buyers are often most stretched when they first undertake a purchase and in the early months of payment, especially when the interest rates are as high as they have been recently.

I shall not oppose the Bill and I invite my hon. Friends not to do so. I hope that it goes through all its stages tonight. I am not aware that it is riddled with so many drafting defects that it need take us all night to dispatch the business, but there seems to be considerable zeal for detailed scrutiny by hon. Members around me. I am not quite sure what the motivation for that is, but I shall be interested to see whether the Opposition discover a drafting defect.

What sticks in my mind after studying the Bill is how little the Government are assuming that the housing market will change. I raised that point when we discussed the Ways and Means resolution. The Minister said that it was not reasonable to talk about revenue forgone in respect of improvements in the housing market because they would not have happened if the measure had not been introduced. However, if the Government expect the measure to cost only £400 million, they must be assuming that during this period there would have been no increase in housing transactions and no increase in housing values, except the little and the few induced by the Bill. That is a pretty depressing forecast for the housing market, but it is perhaps the Government's most honest recent forecast on any of the economic indicators. It suggests that the housing market will be in such a poor way during the coming months that the Bill is unlikely to make a great deal of difference.

11.7 pm

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I agreed with much of what he said about the impact of stamp duty on the housing market and what an irritant it is.

I declare an interest as a chartered surveyor. As such, I have been involved in many property transactions and I take this opportunity to welcome the Bill, which will reduce the cost of such transactions. The costs are far too high and have been for a long time. I have previously attacked the conveyancing system which gives many lawyers the opportunity to rake in large amounts of money. I believe that the system should be simplified so that it is not necessary to use the services of lawyers. Of course, it is not strictly necessary to use lawyers in property transactions now, but most people find it convenient, if expensive, to do so.

It is not necessary to use the services of estate agents when selling property. Many people think that they have to use estate agents when selling property. I assure them that they do not have to do so and that they can save themselves large amounts if they do it themselves.

We have heard from the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) about the Bill. I thought that I heard the sound of many red herrings being dragged about, especially the little dissertation on VAT. The hon. Gentleman conveniently forgot that, under the previous Labour Government, there was a higher rate of VAT, at 25 per cent., on so-called "luxury" items, which included television sets. On that basis, that rate being three times as high as the then so-called "basic" rate of VAT, if there were ever another Labour Government, would they apply the same differential, with VAT on television sets being raised to 52·5 per cent?

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the former Prime Minister stated that under no circumstances would the Conservative Government double VAT?

Mr. Summerson: I am talking about the Labour party, following what it did last time and tripling the rate of VAT on so-called "luxury" items.

Once the Bill has become law, I recommend that the London borough of Waltham Forest reduces its enormous holdings of property. That Labour-controlled council owns property which brings in at least £1 million. Anyone who walks down Hoe street in my constituency will come across two shops side by side which are derelict and boarded up. They been derelict and boarded up for years. That council is always complaining about lack of money, yet is has resources to hand, and if it only used them it could benefit the entire community.

The hon. Member for Wrexham spoke a great deal about whether the Bill would kick-start the market. I remind him that kick-starting is a rather inefficient method by which to start a very small engine. The housing market in such terms is rather a large engine. We shall never be able to kick-start it; we need a battery by which to get it going. The Bill will put some charge into the battery. A number of factors will get the housing market moving and the Bill is just one of them. Any reduction in the cost of buying and selling property is welcome. I welcome the Bill.

11.12 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I believe firmly that the Bill is an out-and-out gimmick. I remember coming into the House in the week in which the legislation was announced when I was dealing with a constituent whose house was being repossessed. I will tell the story later because it makes sense in what I am about to say. It is unbelievable that we should be given such a response when under this Prime Minister, in this year alone, 300 people every day have had their houses repossessed. Last year, 80,000 houses were repossessed. Since this ditherer has been Prime Minister, more than 750,000 people have lost their jobs.

I doubt whether the suspension of stamp duty will help the workers at Ravescraig who will lose their jobs and possibly their homes. It will not help the workers at Armitage Shanks, many of whom have bought their houses. The word "kick-start" is an insult to the thousands of people who have had their houses repossessed during the past decade of the Tory Government. The Government have done little or nothing—in fact, they have caused a massive problem in relation to council housing.

I look to the Government to do something for people. This Government are driving people into early graves. Not content with doing that, they have introduced the Bill while aware that they are not tackling the real problem.

Interest rates are raging. The Prime Minister has kept them at 15 per cent. when all businesses are calling for them to be reduced. Manufacturing and service industries might have been able to develop and allow workers to keep their jobs and maintain their mortgage or rent payments, but the Government have kept interest rates too high and are now introducing desperate measures to try to stop repossessions.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) spoke of house sales. I have never seen such incredible hype from the Tory party and some of their friends out in the country who say that things are not too bad. They should come to my district or I can bring all the local newspapers to show them stories of people who bought their houses at £34,000 and £50,000 and are now taking the desperate measure of emigrating from Scotland for a job. Some of them had to drop their house prices by about £6,000 which gives a lucky chance for anyone with the money to buy them. I am sure that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed would agree that there have been many such sad housing tales in Scotland.

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

I have seen the same problems in London. I am looking for a house—*[Interruption.]* I cannot hear the Conservative Members who are intervening from a sedentary position as I have a hearing aid—I am glad of that sometimes. Some people are trying to sell their houses for £30,000, £40,000 or £60,000 less than they paid for them. What will happen to those people? We are talking not just about repossession, but about absolute bankruptcy and the moral degradation that goes with it. The Government have placed people into such positions by kidding them and telling them the lie that everything was rosy. The former Chancellor that the Government dumped——

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Is my hon. Friend aware that 10 per cent. of home owners in Britain are at least two months in arrears with their mortgage repayments? Does that not support his argument and prove that the present position is serious?

Mr. Graham: Yes; it is a tragedy that 10 per cent. of those with mortgages are still behind in their payments. The Government do not seem to care about that.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Is my hon. Friend aware that many people are now throwing the keys of their property on to the building society's desk because they can no longer cope with the mortgage? They tell the building society to keep the keys, then they walk off and disappear.

Mr. Graham: I had a phone call from a solicitor tonight who told me that a number of his clients were walking out and abandoning him. They were not attempting to tell anyone where they were going, but simply disappearing from the face of the earth. I am sure that we shall hear of more such cases after tonight.

Not long ago an ambulance man whose house was being repossessed came to see me. He was a young man who had never lost a day's work; he had worked constantly and had a young family of three. He bought a council house in Linwood and took on a mortgage that was not too expensive to repay. I am telling it straight to the Minister, and if he wishes to know who the man is I shall gladly let him know. He came to see me when he was facing the possibility of his house being repossessed and his family being made homeless. His wages had fallen dramatically as he was no longer doing normal hours and overtime. His wife had lost her part-time job because of the prevailing economic climate. He had been conned by the Government. He had been told, "This is great. Buy your house and you will live happily ever after." He took the Government's advice and he is now in desperate straits. He cannot pay his mortgage and his house is being repossessed. He came to me and we tried to get the local council to provide him with a house. The council tried desperately to accommodate him.

I also have a case involving a mother with two children at university who receive grants and loans. Her house was being repossessed and she wanted to know why the Government's provision applied only to new house purchases simply to stop repossessions. The Government could have acted on repossessions in a more meaningful way. She has a small part-time job. Her husband left her and disappeared to another country. The building society wants to repossess her house and she has got to go. I fought for weeks until eventually we found a council house for her. The council had to come up with the goods because the woman was to be made homeless. That was another tragic case.

In those two cases the council fulfilled its obligation and housed those people. However, I have another eight cases involving people whose houses have been repossessed because they have lost their jobs, or there have been massive cuts in overtime or short-time working has been introduced. For the love of it, those people cannot provide enough money to pay their mortgages. There is no guarantee that the economy will improve so much that they will return to full-time work or that their employers will be able to increase their wages at least by the rate of inflation. Those eight people are desperate.

However, thousands of people in my constituency and around Renfrew are homeless and waiting for housing. They are desperate to see council officials because the people about whom I am concerned do not have collateral or insurance to get a house in the private rented sector. They can get houses only from the local council, but the councils do not have enough houses to provide housing for all the homeless or for people such as those I have described, who, as a result of the Government's mismanagement of the economy, have had their houses repossessed and have been driven to desperate measures.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does my hon. Friend agree that the stamp duty provision for a first-time purchaser will do nothing for people who already have mortgages? It is only a bribe to the building societies to get off their knees the people they have been robbing for the past five or six years. If the Government really intend to do something for people who have had their houses repossessed, they will have to reduce interest rates to 7 or 8 per cent.

Mr. Graham: I would go further than that. Renfrew district council has borne the brunt of the Government's mismanagement of the housing economy. Over the past few months, it has housed at least 10 people. That has possibly cost £80,000 a house, or £800,000 in all. In the face of that, the Government come up with a pittance of a few million pounds for all of Scotland to deal with homelessness. That might make one laugh, but it makes me sick to the teeth because the people about whom I am concerned are good people. They want to work and have the right to a decent job. Conservative Members can smile all the way to the bank, but those people can only smile all the way to the dole queue.

Mr. Meale: It is not only in Scotland that severe crises are occurring. At the moment, in my constituency 9,500 people are on the local authority waiting list, and 2,700 of them require special needs accommodation. Terminally ill people, severely disabled people and old people cannot get the right type of accommodation. In my area, 850 people are classified as homeless. Thousands of people throughout the east midlands are in exactly the same position. Thousands of people in the midlands have had their homes repossessed. The problem does not occur only in Scotland; it occurs throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Graham: I am most grateful for that information. I am aware of the terrible tragedy. The Government have inflicted poverty on Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales.

I am terribly ashamed to have a decent wage and to be able to afford a house when thousands of people who voted for us are living in squalid poverty because of the Government's ineffectual handling of the economy.

Mr. Meale: Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to consider that an argument that is often put by Conservative Members concerns empty properties. Will he explain to the House the misinformation that Conservative Members are trying to give? If every house were filled, hundreds of thousands of people would still be homeless or in need of proper accommodation.

Mr. Graham: That is a valid point when we are talking about the Government's measures supposedly to stop repossessions and help the homeless.

In Renfrew district, because of the climate, many houses suffer from dampness and condensation. Because of lead pollution in the water, councils have a problem in trying to keep houses fit. There are many empty houses through no fault of the council. I can relate to the Minister chapter and verse of some of the problems that Scotland faces. Councils need support from the Government to tackle the weather problems that create bad housing.

There are many empty houses in our area, but the council needs money to bring them back into a rentable state. The law dictates that those houses must not only be wind and watertight but fit for habitation. At present, Renfrew district council, along with other district councils, has suffered savage cuts. Thousands of millions of pounds have been cut during the decade during which the Tory party has been in power. That has caused a deterioration in our housing stock and put tremendous pressure on local councils to provide people with a roof over their heads.

It is not long since the former Prime Minister stood in a house with a bag of groceries in her hand. Hon. Members may ask, "What has this to do with stamp duty?" I shall tell them in a minute. The former Prime Minister was proud of what that bag of groceries cost. However, she would probably only have a slice of bread in that bag today. The house that she stood in would probably be a tent or a lump of cardboard. Today, the family concerned would not be able to afford the food that was in the bag. Many people can no longer afford to live comfortably.

Tonight I spoke to my mother, who is a pensioner. I told her that this week we would have the poverty debate and that tonight we would have the stamp duty debate. My mother said, "The stamp duty debate, son?" I said, "Yes, mother." She said, "What is that about?" I said, "Well, the Prime Minister has seen his chances slipping away, and the general election will be the nail in his coffin. Therefore, today he is attempting to buy a few votes, mother, and he has come up with this stamp duty measure." "Well, Thomas, tell me what it means," she said. I said, "It means that stamp duty will be abolished for houses that cost between £30,000 and £250,000." My mother said, "Goodness God, do people buy houses that cost a quarter of a million pounds? Son, it must be the biggest family in Britain if they are to live in a house costing £250,000. It must be the Taj Mahal palace." I said, "Mother, unfortunately, there are people who have £250,000 to spend on a house—but not around here. They are down south." I then had to explain what that meant.

At the end of the day, however, when I look in the mirror, I have to ask myself what the Bill really means. It certainly does not mean a lot to the people I know whose homes are being repossessed. It is not the people in the high-flying jobs who are losing their jobs and houses; it is the plumbers, the butchers, the bakers the tailors, the toilet attendants and the council workers. They are the people who are being thrown on the dole and who do not have the money to pay the mortgage. Furthermore, they are not buying houses that cost £250,000. Their houses cost £16,000, £20,000 or £30,000. They are the people who are being thrown out of their homes because of repossessions. They are the first people to lose their jobs, and they are the people who cannot afford to build up a kitty to carry them over.

The Government are sick not to recognise that. Instead of trying to help some of his wealthy friends, the Prime Minister should have taken a look at something that could be targeted at the local councils to provide them with sufficient money to enable them to build homes for local people to rent. Such money would also enable the councils to make many of the empty properties fit for habitation and for renting.

Often when I speak in the House I see cynical smiles and grins on the faces of Conservative Members. That makes me angry. In other places, I might not be as civilised as I am in the House, and if I were to take the Financial Secretary into my community folk there would not be so nice to him as Tommy Graham. They would not sit back and simply accept that the Minister and his hon. Friends grin at their poverty and losses because they blame the Government for inflicting such damage on them. So I make a plea to the Financial Secretary in all sincerity: "When I am speaking with sincerity, please listen with sincerity."

I shall go further. I believe firmly that rural communities are also suffering and that the abolition of stamp duty will not help those in the towns and villages of Scotland and other areas——

Mr. Meale: Perhaps my hon. Friend will tell the Minister what good the Bill will do to those people at Ravenscraig who wish to remain in employment and who, because of the Government's strategy, have to change employment and, in the process, try to sell their homes in an area where massive numbers of houses will be put up for sale. What good will the few pounds of stamp duty that they save be to them?

Mr. Cryer: The answer is public ownership.

Mr. Graham: I am grateful for help on this matter.

The possibility of 1,200 steel workers selling their houses in the current housing market in Scotland is lamentable. There is no chance of selling even a dog's kennel in the housing market in Scotland if jobs and industries continue to be lost on the current scale. I must advise the Financial Secretary that there is no chance of the Armitage Shanks people selling their houses either—although they live in the constituency where the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), has his house. As I said earlier, people trying to sell their houses have had to take dramatic cuts in price.

Mrs. Golding: My hon. Friend has mentioned Armitage Shanks. He may be aware that I represent the Potteries and the areas around Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire where more than 600 jobs have been lost in a similar industry involving the manufacture of

[Mrs. Golding]

kitchenware and bathroomware. It is an absolute disgrace. How does the Minister think that people can manage to keep up the repayments on their homes when they do not even have a job?

Mr. Graham: I am sure that my hon. Friend knows the answer that I will get. It will be the same one that everyone else gets. The Government will give people six months of dole money but after that abandon them to the desert of homelessness and unemployment.

Tonight we have seen an attempt to present a gimmick as a saviour. What an absolute disgrace. What inhumane treatment of the 80,000 people whose homes were repossessed last year. What an inhumane future the Government present to the 300 people daily who have had their houses repossessed this year. The Minister should hang his head in shame.

The Government should have made sufficient funds available to local authorities. There should have been a major house-building programme to give the homeless the right to a roof over their heads. More importantly, the Government should regenerate people's right to work. Instead of the end of stamp duty, our people should see the end of the Government. They have the right to a job that brings home a decent wage and can make them proud to be able to pay their rent or buy their own home. They have the right to a job that gives them consistency and the ability to live in this country decently and pay their mortgage for 25 years, rather than not knowing whether they will have a job this week, next week, tomorrow or the day after. Minister, stand up and fight for the homeless people and those who have had their houses repossessed instead of fighting for the moneyed people.

11.35 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): This measure to remove stamp duty for the next eight months is a stamp-sized effort by the Government to deal with a whole package of problems in the housing market. Stamp duty will be back on 20 August. As my hon. Friends have said, the measure is only for the election. It is an election gimmick. It is tinkering with the problems in the housing market and the suffering that they are causing. However, it is expensive tinkering. It will cost about £400 million. It is the only measure that the Government have taken to deal with the housing problem and it does not measure up to the scale of the problem.

I suspect that when the figures are announced in the next few weeks they will show that 100,000 houses were repossessed in 1991. Many more repossessions are in the pipeline. Every one of those 100,000 repossessions is a terrible tale of misery for the families and people whose homes have been snatched away from them as a result of the economic circumstances in which they have been placed. One in five of the homes on the market are repossessions. That is one of the reasons for the great collapse in the housing market.

That collapse was brought about by three main factors. The first was the uncontrolled rise in house prices which was way above inflation in the 1980s. The Government allowed prices to let rip as a way of making money, not to deal with people's housing circumstances for the future. It was just a way of making money. That bubble has burst with a vengeance. The Government are not prepared to take responsibility for the policies that created the difficulties in the 1980s. So people have to pick up the problem.

The collapse was also brought about by record high interest rates, particularly when set against inflation. People had to pay high mortgage interest rates. Now on top of that we have the impact of the recession. Unemployment has gone through the roof. It rose by 700,000 last year. People have insufficient incomes to meet their bills. Unemployment is not the only problem; the argument about tax is relevant. People have other bills to meet. For instance, there is the poll tax, as well as VAT on the goods that they buy. For that reason, they do not have enough money to meet the record mortgage payments. In addition to all the personal misery that has been created, there has been a collapse of the housing market.

Hon. Members should consider the way in which the collapse has affected the construction industry. The fact is that if there is no housing market people do not have an incentive to build new homes. Obviously that affects the private sector. Many homeless people come to my surgery and to the surgery of the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson). Homes should be built for such people, but, as the market collapse proves, this cannot be left to the private sector. In present circumstances, it will not do the job.

Mr. Summerson: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will mention the housing action trust, which is doing excellent work in the London borough of Waltham Forest and will deal with two of the worst estates in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. Cohen: Indeed. I have been arguing for an improvement in council estates. I welcome all such measures. The hon. Gentleman has referred to a particular problem that must be tackled. Overall, the Government have not invested nearly enough to improve council estates. That is why such serious problems have developed over several decades. Indeed, those problems have worsened during the past decade, when investment has been lacking.

However, the collapsed housing market is a different problem. It is a problem for people who want to own their homes. The market has failed to provide the houses that are needed. Only the local authorities can do the job effectively, yet the Government have prevented them from making the necessary investment. The ban on the use, for this purpose, of the receipts from the sale of council houses should be lifted. Indeed, the Government should have done that straight away. What we need is a package of measures to enable local authorities to build homes. While the matter is left to the market, homelessness will increase. Central intervention is required.

The £400 million that this stamp duty relief is costing would be better used to help the victims of repossession to stay in their homes. Those people should be allowed to convert mortgage payments to rent payments. Councils have a duty to house them and, as council accommodation is not available, that is an intolerable burden. The ricochet effect is felt by people in my borough of Waltham Forest —indeed, by people all over London—whose names are on waiting lists. Some families in very poor council accommodation need transfers. There are some, for instance, who need two bedrooms instead of one, but, because councils have a duty to house people whose homes

have been repossessed, others have virtually no chance of a transfer. The Government should put this money into helping the victims of repossession to stay in their homes. The fact that one in five of houses for sale is a repossessed home has killed the market. If the Government want to revive the housing market, they should find ways to enable those who face repossession to stay in their own homes.

In my intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), I made the point that, in the current state of the housing market, many people have mortgages that are greater than the value of their properties. If they cannot afford the mortgage repayments and are forced to sell their homes, they will still be saddled with astronomic debts for years to come. In effect, such people will be bankrupt, but the Government have not shown the slightest glimmer of concern; these people have not been given tax assistance.

Mr. Meale: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has mentioned this problem, because in the past few months people have come to my surgery and told me that they can no longer keep up their mortgage repayments but the value of their properties would not be enough to cover the mortgage even if they were able to sell. Some have said that they offered their properties to anybody who would take up the mortgage repayments, thereby forgoing any investment in the properties. This has happened time and time again.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend has made a good point. Many people are caught in the trap of not being able to afford mortgage repayments, and often have mortgages that are greater than the value of their properties. Such people have no way of escape, and the Government should be doing something for them.

On 10 July 1990, I introduced, as a ten-minute Bill, the Mortgage Assistance Bill. Had the Government accepted that Bill, we should not now have a collapsed housing market and 100,000 repossessions. I will not repeat all that I said then—it is to be found at columns 181 to 183 of *Hansard* of that day. However, I made five main proposals.

The first was to allow mortgage payers to convert to part-ownership, thereby scaling down the ownership element and allowing time to meet reduced payments. The second was to let the mortgage payer convert to shared ownership with a local authority or housing association, so that he would pay half mortgage and half rent, thereby reducing the amount that he would have to pay and the debt that he had incurred.

My third suggestion was that we should facilitate conversion from ownership to rental, and a great deal more needs to be done to allow those faced with debts that they cannot repay to move over to rental but to stay in their own homes. Such a move could be supported by local authorities.

Fourthly, I said that there should be a duty on the lending institutions, the building societies and the banks to sort out alternative arrangements before any court action for repossession. All too often they wash their hands of cases, take people to court and repossess properties before investigating all the means for helping people to stay in their homes.

The fifth measure that I proposed was special funds for local authorities and new borrowing arrangements to enable them to enter shared ownership schemes, and special funds to housing associations. The Government still ignore that suggestion. They will not give local authorities money to tackle the problem of repossessions.

This puny, stamp-sized measure that the Government have introduced is far too little, far too late.

11.50 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): The Bill will only tinker at the edges of a housing crisis that the Government fail or do not wish to recognise. Anything that helps to solve housing problems is welcome, and I am advised by the building societies that the Bill will go a small way to easing problems for them; they do not say that it will ease the problems of my constituents. The lowering of the mortgage interest rate is to be welcomed, but all the comments about that have been made in terms of helping the housing market, not of helping those of my constituents who are homeless.

During my time in local government and central Government I have never known such a housing crisis. About 90 per cent. of the letters in my postbag concern housing. I hold a surgery every Saturday and Sunday somewhere within the constituency, and about 90 per cent. of the complaints that are brought to me involve housing. The Bill will go nowhere to deal with the problems. I have never known circumstances in which young people with children are facing the possibility of going into hostel accommodation because no housing is available. We should be disgusted with ourselves. The Government should be especially disgusted with themselves for allowing such a crisis to develop. Young mothers of 18, 19 and 20 years of age are facing the prospect of hostel accommodation.

What is the reason for this? The answer is that the Government turned their back on local government itself, and on the way in which local government deals with its housing responsibilities. In 1979, when the Government came to power, those of my constituents who placed their name on the local authority housing list had a home within three weeks. A single person who placed his name on the list had a home within 10 weeks. There is not a chance in hell of getting a house in my constituency now because there are none. That is because the local authority has been unable to build houses for the past six years.

The Government stand condemned because they have not provided sufficient money to enable local authorities to get rid of old housing stock that should have been condemned and cleared away. This stock is having to be used because of the Government's housing policy.

The Government stand condemned for many things but especially for the housing crisis that their policies have created. As I have said, the Bill will do nothing to house people. It must be understood that 300 families a week are losing their homes. Those people turn to local authorities and they are being turned away. As a result, those without their own home move in with friends, parents or relatives. The overcrowding should never be tolerated. I thought that we had got rid of it some time ago. Indeed, we did, but because of the Government's ideology on home ownership unacceptable overcrowding has returned.

I agree with the Government about home ownership. There is no finer state within a community—for those who wish to buy. Unfortunately, many people either do not wish to buy or are unable to buy. When there is a 40 per cent. unemployment rate in a constituency, as there is in

[Mr. Allen McKay]

mine, many people are unable to buy and will be unable to do so for many years. There is not a market to satisfy such a position.

The private rented sector is milking the position; it is all right. There is certainly a market there. When people are turned out of their homes they have to go into rented accommodation. My constituency is a fairly-low-rent area, but people are now having to pay £60 to £70 a week. In fact, they are not having to pay, the DSS has to pay. The people whom the Government talk about—the community charge payer and the taxpayer—have to find the money for that rent. There is a lucrative market in the private rented sector because people have nowhere else to go.

My local authority, which had 16,500 houses, has now sold about 8,000—50 per cent. of its stock. That has left a huge gap because the local authority cannot replace them. However, some of the 8,000 people who bought those houses are now themselves becoming homeless. Why cannot the local authority buy back those houses? Why cannot it be reimbursed for doing so? Those houses could then be put back into the rented sector, which would sort out a great number of problems for a great many people.

Why cannot local authorities return to the position in which they can buy rented and owner-occupied accommodation that is for sale at a competitive price? Why is not the money available for them to do that? Until that happens, all the tinkering at the edges will be to no avail. The Government may think that it will get them off the hook, but the people whom the Government's housing policy has affected will not let them off the hook. They and their families will not forget the misery that that policy has caused.

11.57 pm

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I want to talk about the state of the building industry both in my constituency and throughout the country. Steetley is a well known and large employer in the brick industry. It was encouraged by the Government to make massive investment in its plant in my constituency. It has been working at only 50 per cent. capacity ever since.

Since September 1989, about 3,000 people have lost their jobs in the brick industry. Steetley is spending its time fighting a takeover bid which it does not want, which the workers from my constituency certainly do not want, and which the workers and management throughout the company do not want. The company could better spend its time producing bricks to build homes for people, rather than fighting takeover bids.

In the slate and tile industry—again an important industry in my constituency— —

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I regret to tell the hon. Lady that she is a long way away from the subject under debate. She must relate her remarks more closely to the Bill.

Mrs. Golding: My remarks are relevant, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Maude: Order.

Mrs. Golding: Does the Minister want to say something?

Mr. Maude: No.

Mrs. Golding: My remarks are relevant because the relief on stamp duty is intended to encourage people to buy homes.

The building industry seems to be closing all over the country, at a time when homes are needed. Where is the necessary production to take place? The same is happening in the ceramic industry. In Scotland, Armitage Shanks is closing, with attendant job losses, and the industry is also suffering in north Staffordshire. Industries do not start up again simply because of a change in Government policy.

Mr. Meale: If the trapped £18 billion in local government receipts from the sale of council properties throughout the United Kingdom were released, the building industry could construct some 550,000 new homes, accommodating more than 1 million people. Given that—according to Shelter and the Salvation Army—that is the number of people who are registered as homeless, the housing problem would be greatly eased by such a move.

Mrs. Golding: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What the Government's policy is doing to people is disgraceful. So many of them are coming to all our surgeries: young couples with children living in top-floor flats, for instance. How can mothers with babies and small children in pushchairs climb stairs? Old people are living in homes that are entirely unsuitable; they desperately need ground-floor accommodation, but they cannot obtain it.

You may think, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I am wandering slightly from the subject of the Bill. The Bill is designed to release people and to make the housing market move, but the Government will not succeed with it. What is needed is a concerted policy: that is clear to us when we talk to local authorities, housing associations and, indeed, manufacturers. Doors need handles; windows need catches and glass. Then there are all the ceramic fittings for bathrooms and kitchens, and the bricks and tiles. All those things must be produced, and we cannot simply flick a switch and expect production to start up again.

The Bill goes a little way, but it is only a very little way. What we need is a Labour Government, committed to housing the homeless.

12.3 am

Mr. Maude: It is usual on these occasions to say what a useful debate we have had. I do not think, in all sincerity, that I can say that this time; by and large, this has been a fairly sterile occasion.

We have presented a measure that has been widely welcomed. We never claimed that it would transform the world, or switch on a light in darkness. We said that it was one part of an important package, which would have a measurable and serious impact on the housing market and would greatly benefit a large number of people. It is therefore mildly irritating when Labour Members come along, shedding copious crocodile tears about all the problems and refusing to address the issues raised by the Bill.

Labour Members seemed to veer wildly between saying that the Bill would be hopelessly ineffective and would make no difference to the housing market before 20 August, and saying that it would devastate the housing market after that date. They cannot have it both ways. As was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), either it will have no effect before, or after, 20 August, or the reverse.

The fact is that the Bill will bring forward transactions, as all who have studied the position recognise. It is a good and useful measure, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clause 1

TEMPORARY RELIEF FROM STAMP DUTY

12.5 am

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 10, leave out '£250,000,' and insert '£240,000,'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Harold Walker): With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 12, leave out '£2,500,' and insert '£2,400,'.

Dr. Marek: I am sorry that the Financial Secretary felt that he could not say that we have had a useful debate. I can only surmise that the Tory party has been caught out and that he did not like it. No crocodile tears were shed on this side. Our speeches were sincere and honest and addressed the real problem for which the Government have not provided a solution.

Amendment No. 1 seeks to reduce the £250,000 limit to £240,000. There are few houses, if any, in my constituency that cost £250,000. I do not therefore see why the limit has to be set so high. However, it may have something to do with the south of England. If so, I shall wait with bated breath to hear what the Financial Secretary has to say about it.

I suspect that people with very big houses are not short of a bob or two. A stamp duty concession for them seems yet again to be the Tory party looking after its own. It looked after the rich when it reduced the higher rate of income tax from 60 to 40 per cent. All the tax reliefs went to the rich. I wonder whether the Government are playing the same old game. The amendment is partly a probing amendment. It seems to us that £240,000 would be more appropriate than £250,000. I am prepared to be persuaded otherwise. However, unless the Minister can put forward a very good argument, we may have to insist on pressing the amendment to a Division.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) described the amendment as a probing amendment. He sought to make a point about the level at which we have chosen to set the threshold. No huge matter of principle is involved. Where the threshold in any taxation matter is set is a question of judgment, not of fundamental principle. The reason for setting it at £250,000 is that it will exempt about 90 per cent. of the purchases of residential property from stamp duty. We shall retain about 90 per cent. of the revenue from stamp duty in the case of transactions affecting commercial and other properties.

The proposal, as formulated, is very well targeted and concentrates the benefit where it is most likely to stimulate activity in the housing market. I said earlier that about 600,000 purchasers of residential property should be exempted. It is not a great matter of principle. We believe that we have pitched the threshold at the right level. Therefore, I invite the Committee to support the provision, as drafted, and the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment negatived.

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 1, line 14, leave out '20th' and insert '30th'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 4, in page 1, line 17, leave out '20th August' and insert '7th May'.

No. 6, in page 1, line 24, leave out '16th' and insert '31st'.

No. 7, in clause 2, page 1, line 28, leave out '20th' and insert '30th'.

Dr. Marek: We come to an interesting set of amendments that fall into two groups: amendments Nos. 3 and 6 and amendments Nos. 4 and 7. I originally considered tabling an amendment to replace 20 December with 10 December, but the Table Office ruled me out of order. The Government's rules on tabling amendments prohibited that.

Mr. Maude: No.

Dr. Marek: Through their majority and will, the Government impose Standing Orders on the House. The Opposition are prohibited from tabling an amendment that would increase taxation.

An important issue is at stake, so we tabled amendment No. 3. I wanted to make a point about the unfairness that might arise if someone's property deal were stamped on, for example, 15 December. They would say, "A few days later, we could have saved ourselves £1,000 or £2,000." The Government gave no warning of their intentions. On 19 or 20 December, they produced, like a rabbit out of a hat, a concession on stamp duty.

I realise that the amendment simply delays the problem. If the Government accepted our amendment, no doubt people who had their instruments stamped on 7 or 8 December would feel just as aggrieved as those who had their instruments stamped on 17 or 18 December.

An article that appeared in *The Independent* on 11 January says:

"On 29 November last year, Elaine and Graham Bradbury-Stewart completed the purchase of their home in Lightwater, Surrey. They paid £125,000. If they had moved just 20 days later they would have saved £1,250 in stamp duty—a sizeable chunk of their moving expenses of £5,500. Not surprisingly they feel somewhat aggrieved. Mr. Bradbury-Stewart says, 'We were "gobsmacked" as they say—£1,250 would have bought some new furniture, or the bathroom suite that we need. I can see no real justification for having the tax in the first place. It is the Government taking 1 per cent. for nothing.' Neither Graham nor Elaine believes that increasing the threshold temporarily will boost the housing market."

On Second Reading, I produced a fair amount of evidence to show the veracity of that statement. People regard it as an election ploy. That is the purpose of the Bill—an election ploy.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Is the hon. Gentleman satisfied with the fact that he has only one Labour Member supporting him, apart from Members of the Front Bench?

Dr. Marek: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has been here for long. He probably walked in recently, as I do not remember seeing him.

Mr. Mills *rose*——

12.15 am

Dr. Marek: If the hon. Gentleman will let me answer him, I shall be happy to give way to him again. He must examine who has spoken in the debate. One Tory Back Bencher has spoken, but four or five Opposition Back Benchers have spoken. That makes my point. It shows bad grace for the hon. Gentleman to complain that I am calling the Bill a gimmick when the main tenor and thrust of my Second Reading speech was to that effect. If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene again, I shall give way.

Mr. Mills: So the hon. Gentleman regards it as very good that four or five hon. Members have spoken in support of his speech?

Mrs. Golding: Six to one.

Dr. Marek: The hon. Gentleman should not push us too far or he might find himself here much longer one early morning——

Mr. Greg Knight (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): He was joking.

Dr. Marek: He was joking, was he? I shall accept the Whip's advice on that, but let us return to the argument.

One argument involves the inherent unfairness in the Government's suddenly producing without any warning a substantial concession in duty. The people who had their instruments stamped a few days before the Government produced such a bonus feel aggrieved and wonder why they could not have partaken of it to a certain extent. It is no use the Financial Secretary saying that they were going to buy property anyway and that the measure is designed to kick-start the housing market, if I may use that phraseology.

The Minister made his announcement on 19 or 20 December and some instruments would probably be stamped on 21, 22, 28, 29 and 30 December and were then going through the pipeline. What is good for one set of people should be good for another set and I look forward to hearing what the Financial Secretary has to say about that.

The other group of amendments deals with when the concession should end. I could not resist tabling an amendment to help the Conservative party. The Conservative party is calculating on ending the concession on 19 August, but I think that it should be ended on 7 May. If it were to be ended on 7 May—on election day—there would be such a hive of activity before then that it could perhaps be believed that Conservative party policy was working and that the market was very active. It would also give the Opposition a chance to demonstrate the norm—that immediately after the concession ended, the market would cease to exist for a considerable time. We have had these problems before when joint mortgage relief came to an end and I fail to see why the Government have introduced a measure of a similar nature under which there will be problems on 20 August.

The second group of amendments seeks to elucidate from the Minister how he feels the situation will develop and what will happen to the market on that date and beyond. I shall be interested to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Maude: As the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) eventually managed to sort out, there are two broad groups of amendments: one makes a silly point and the other a bad one.

The bad point is about the time from which the welcome relief from stamp duty comes into force. He said that it should have been introduced earlier because it was terribly unfair that people who had already had their documents stamped would be denied the relief.

Whenever any change is made to any taxation, some people fall on the helpful side and some people fall on the unhelpful side. That is simply a fact of life. If one makes the date 10 December, 10 November or 10 January, there will still be a line, and some people will fall on one side and some people will fall on the other. It seems to make sense that one should say that the provisions will come into force from the date on which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that the change would take place. People who were executing documents after then knew that they would have the benefit of the relief from stamp duty or the refunds under clause 2. Those whose transactions were already complete knew that the transaction would be completed on the basis which they had expected. There is nothing especially dramatic or unfair about that.

The silly point made by the hon. Member for Wrexham concerned the date at which the provision would end. He thinks that it is frightfully witty to make the point about amending the Bill so that the suspension ends on what he fancies is a date on which the general election may take place. The hon. Gentleman has sought to argue this evening that the provision is nothing more than an electoral gimmick, which he contends with what I discern as a growing element of unease, gradually working towards panic. In the way in which he moved the silly amendment, he conceded that the measure will have the effect that we intend, and that it will draw forward transactions and thus have a stimulating effect on the housing market. Although his points are not very good, he has inadvertently drawn attention to the underlying belief of Labour Front-Bench Members that the measure will work. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that.

Dr. Marek: The Financial Secretary has put his finger on the point. The measure will bring forward transactions, but it will do so at the cost of having a dearth of transactions later. That is the problem, and that is why the Bill is a gimmick. It is not a long-lasting solution. Transactions will be made earlier than they otherwise would have been, but there are likely to be few more—perhaps no more—transactions as a result of the Bill. That is why the Opposition tabled the amendments.

Amendment negatived.

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 5, in page 1, line 18, leave out subsection (3).

Mr. Mills: Formally.

Dr. Marek: I do not move it formally. The amendment is a probing amendment. I will not speak long on it as I want to hear what the Financial Secretary has to say about it and how he will defend the clause.

Mr. Maude: It is a little difficult to know what the hon. Gentleman seeks to probe through the deeply thought out and stimulating probing amendment. He suggests that we should remove clause 1(3) which concerns documents executed on or after 20 December which were not already stamped before the resolution was passed. The general rule is that documents cannot be given in evidence or used for other legal purposes, except in criminal proceedings,

unless they have been duly stamped in accordance with the law in force when they were executed. If a document was executed on, say, 20 December, the law in force at that time would have required it to be stamped on the basis of the £30,000 threshold because the House had not yet passed the resolution to give effect to the new threshold. Now that we have passed the resolution, the benefit of the new threshold can be given.

Clause 1(3) ensures that documents will not be subject to a legal challenge merely because the new threshold did not yet have statutory effect at the time at which they were executed. That is, therefore, a necessary protection for the taxpayer and the amendment would remove that protection. I therefore invite the hon. Gentleman, having probed in a compelling way, to withdraw the amendment.

Dr. Marek: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

PAYMENTS IN RESPECT OF STAMPED INSTRUMENTS

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 2, line 7, leave out 'one year' and insert 'six months'.

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 11, in page 2, line 13, at end insert

'and within three months of the claim being made'.

Dr. Marek: The two amendments are fairly sensible —at least, amendment No. 11 is—*[Laughter.]* Conservative Members laugh, but the fact that I said that amendment No. 11 was sensible said nothing about amendment No. 8, which seeks to change the period during which a claim can be made from one year to six months. That seems sensible as one does not want legislation that could result in claims being left on the statute book for too long. I should have thought that legal advisers would draw the attention of prospective purchasers to the Bill and a claim would be made in a matter of days. I am prepared to be persuaded by the Financial Secretary that the period should be one year, but I think that six months would be better. That was why I did not give an unequivocal view on the amendment.

However, I am clear about amendment No. 11. It is possible that the commissioners will delay repaying amounts due and the amendment seeks to limit that delay to three months which I believe is sensible. I hope that the Financial Secretary will agree to the amendment.

Mr. Maude: On the hon. Gentleman's first point about reducing the period for claiming a refund, there is no magic in one figure as opposed to another and not very much hangs on this one way or the other. We made a broad judgment on what is a sensible period to allow for claims to be made and decided on 12 months. The hon. Gentleman is right in saying that in practice most claims will be made quickly—within a matter of days, not months —but there may be cases where, for one reason or another —because someone is ill or temporarily working overseas or even, perhaps, because of an oversight—the claim is not made quickly. As it does not much matter whether some claims are made later rather than earlier, we wanted to allow reasonable time to cover such cases.

It could be argued that the limit is on the generous side, but I do not see any particular advantage in reducing it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that, while no great weight attaches to this matter either way, the time limit in the Bill is reasonable and defensible, so the amendment should be withdrawn.

Amendment No. 11 proposes that the Inland Revenue should be required to make reimbursement within three months of a claim being made. It involves an important matter of principle: in practice, the Revenue will make the reimbursement as quickly as possible once it has been established that a payment is properly due. I expect that that reimbursement will be made well within the three months after the claim is made.

The problem with the amendment is that payment by the Revenue will depend on the necessary conditions being satisfied. It is not clear what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting should happen in cases where the Revenue cannot be satisfied that those conditions have been met until more than three months after the claim has been made, for example, where information in support of the claim is slow in coming forward. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish the Revenue to be required to make a payment without being satisfied that it is properly due.

The fact that I resist the amendment does not mean that I would expect payments to take more than three months. However, the amendment would place the Revenue in a position that the Government could not defend. In those circumstances, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

12.30 am

Dr. Marek: I understand what the Financial Secretary to the Treasury means about amendment No. 8. That is a matter of judgment. I also understand what he says about amendment No. 11. However, it is an important part of a citizens charter that a citizen should have some right in that moneys that are due should be paid. While there may be some defects, the sense of the amendment is clear. If the claim has been made and the commissioners are satisfied, they should pay that money as quickly as possible. Three months is a generous period.

The Opposition feel strongly about that. The public and our citizens should have some right and the matter should not be left to the mercy of commissioners, the Government or anyone else. I would like to divide the House on amendment No. 11, but to withdraw amendment No. 8.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in clause 2, page 2, line 9, leave out paragraph (d).

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 10, in page 2, line 10, at end insert

'and (e) any conditions in paragraph (d) above shall be regulated by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a Resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 12, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'may' and insert 'shall'.

Dr. Marek: The amendments seek to define a little more tightly the conditions that may be applied by the

[Dr. Marek]

commissioners. They also give control to the House, in that any such conditions shall be subject to a negative resolution procedure in the House.

Amendment No. 12 replaces "may" with "shall" and amendment No. 9 seeks to delete paragraph (d). In other words, it would change the Bill so that commissioners may not impose other conditions.

I understand that none of the amendments is necessarily perfect. However, the Bill states:

"such other conditions (if any) as the Commissioners may determine".

That gives a lot of power to the commissioners, but no redress for the citizen or applicant who wants his or her money to be returned. The commissioners may decide on reasonable conditions and I am not against that. That would be right. However, they may sometimes decide on unreasonable conditions. If that is the case, the Bill should be tightened up and and I hope that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will agree about that.

Mr. Cryer: I want to draw the attention of the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to some of the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek). The Bill will pass to the Commissioners of Inland Revenue an ability to legislate.

It is true that that applies to a very narrow area in respect of instruments that were executed on or after 20 December 1991 and before 16 January 1992 and stamped before 16 January. However, there is also the application of restrospective legislation about which the House is very cautious. The Minister will claim that it is usual in taxation to apply retrospective powers. That may be true when concessions are made, but, as the Financial Secretary knows, when retrospective powers are applied for a tax that is being levied, we run into great trouble. In effect, people are asked to make payments for back taxation, which is deemed to be very unfair, and that is why the House generally looks rather cautiously at retrospective legislation.

As the commissioners' powers are not qualified, because the Bill allows

"such other conditions (if any) as the Commissioners may determine are satisfied"

amendment No. 10 allows for negative procedure instruments to be provided by the Government. That is a reasonable precaution. It is a narrow matter. It would not be the first time that the House has required delegated powers to be exercised by a Minister over a narrow range of subjects. The House should be extremely cautious in delegating powers to unelected people outside the House. It does that on a number of occasions, but the House is extremely sloppy and careless in its supervision of delegated legislation, anyhow. Sooner or later, an almighty error will cause pressure from outside the House to produce changes in the scrutiny of delegated legislation.

It is about time that the House looked at this matter in more detail. When changes have been made in the system of delegated legislation, it has always been because serious errors had been made. The room for error is greater when powers are granted to bodies outside the House. Although it has many faults, the House has the ability to provide some scrutiny for even the most esoteric and labyrinthine legislation. The Financial Secretary will correct me if I am wrong, but clause 2(1)(d), which contains the power of the commissioners to provide conditions, could provide for people to be ineligible for the stamp duty concessions which the Bill provides. If people who applied before 16 December 1992 were in breach of the conditions which the commissioners are given power to apply, they would lose the right to exemption of stamp duty.

The Financial Secretary may say that the commissioners may never apply any of those powers, because the Bill states, "If they wish to apply any of the conditions." However, those powers are given to the commissioners. Unless there is further primary legislation to take them back, they are being handed over unconditionally to the commissioners. Therefore, we should take a fair amount of care in doing that.

I shall be interested to hear the Financial Secretary's comments on how he expects that the commissioners will apply clause 2(1)(d), why it is inserted, why the commissioners have been given such discretion, and whether that discretion is necessary. The Financial Secretary must have some examples in mind. If those matters are genuinely trivial, the Committee might be satisfied, bearing in mind that the powers are unqualified. They simply have the right to create conditions, and that is less than satisfactory. Surely the Financial Secretary must have something in mind or that provision would not be in the Bill. I look forward to the Financial Secretary's comments, and I hope that he can satisfy me on the validity of that provision.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has made an important point clearly and lucidly, and if this were not a temporary provisions Bill, we would be entitled to press it a great deal further. I was not happy to see in the Bill the words that he quoted, but in this case they relate to and will be in force for only a very short period and do not look likely to restrict the concession a great deal. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman has given a timely warning.

A curious situation appears to have developed. I was trying to develop an index of official Opposition concern. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) said that the Opposition were very concerned about amendment No. 11 and would therefore divide the House on it—I am inclined to support him on that point. However, if I was looking for a measure of official Opposition concern, I should think that the fact that the hon. Member for Bradford, South has spoken in the debate is possibly a measure of relatively greater Opposition concern than would have been the case if only the hon. Member for Wrexham had spoken. A debate in which not only the hon. Member for Bradford, South speaks but in which the hon. Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) delivers an impassioned speech must be an index of even greater Opposition concern. That combination of speakers arose against the whole principle of the Bill, but did not lead to a Division or to a vote against the principle of the Bill. A strange inverse principle of Opposition concern appears to be at work.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South raised a perfectly sound point and I hope that the Financial Secretary, and especially the parliamentary draftsmen, will take it seriously into account.

Mr. Maude: I have some sympathy with the points raised by the hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). As the Committee and especially all those who are accustomed to

dealing with financial legislation know, there are tiers of legislation. Some things are rightly regarded as being of such importance and permanence that only primary legislation is satisfactory. For less important matters, secondary legislation that is subject either to positive or negative resolution is regarded as an adequate protection, and for things that are even lower down the scale of importance, arrangements such as this are regarded as satisfactory. The hon. Member for Bradford, South is entirely right to test and probe the provisions and to require Ministers to set out why they think that this approach is right here.

I am happy to tell the House that I shall set out only briefly a little about the way in which the reimbursement arrangements will work. People will be able to claim a reimbursement from the Revenue in the circumstances that we have set out if they would have paid less duty or none on the basis of the new £250,000 threshold. When they paid the duty, they will have been given a special receipt for it. With their claim for reimbursement, they will need to produce that receipt and the stamped document. But in some cases it may not be possible for the claimant to produce the stamped document because the appropriate registrar cannot release it. In those circumstances, the Stamp Office will advise what alternative evidence should be produced. In order to ensure that reimbursement is claimed only once on any particular document, the document may be stamped to show that the reimbursement has been claimed.

As all hon. Members who have spoken have acknowledged, in practice we expect the number of reimbursements to be small—low hundreds rather than thousands—because most people will have decided to wait for the new threshold to be given legal effect before presenting their documents to be stamped.

The clause permits the Inland Revenue to lay down conditions for reimbursement. It has been suggested it was unduly wide to allow the Revenue to determine what the conditions should be. But the reason for that is to allow flexibility to cater for particular circumstances. For example, an absolute requirement that the applicant should produce the original stamped document would cause problems in some cases, because the registrar might not be able to release the document to him. In those cases, the Revenue will need to ask for details of the document and may need to arrange directly with the registrar for the document to be stamped to show that the reimbursement has been made. In some cases other evidence may be required—for example, because the claim has been made by a different person from the one who is named on the receipt for the duty. There may well be good reasons for that. For example, the taxpayer may have died or may have changed his solicitor. It is sensible that the Revenue should be able to satisfy itself that the claim is well founded and ensure that double claims are not made for the same duty.

Several unusual circumstances may crop up in no more than one or two cases. It is unnecessary to create all the paraphernalia of secondary legislation so that particular conditions can apply to no more than a handful of cases. I have considered the matter carefully. I am confident that this is a proper occasion for the use of this type of power. It is important to ensure that double claims are not made for the same duty and that claims are well founded. Amendment No. 9 would prevent the Revenue from taking those precautions.

This is a sensible, pragmatic and flexible arrangement. I can undertake that the Revenue will operate it in a reasonable and sensible way. In those circumstances, I hope that the Committee is satisfied with my explanation and that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

12.45 am

Mr. Cryer: Madam Deputy Chairman—Chairwoman—Chairperson. *[Laughter.]* I am covering all eventualities, Miss Boothroyd. After all that difficulty with descriptions, I should like to concentrate on what the Minister has said about the power granted in clause 2(1)(d). The power is drafted too widely. Yet it covers a narrow area. It is to require alternative evidence where applicants have to provide proof of payment when they pay the stamp duty and then seek a reimbursement. That is a perfectly legitimate process within the framework of the legislation.

I suspect that the reason why the power is rather widely drafted is that people who draft legislation have got into the habit of writing in a belt-and-braces clause so that they have the necessary powers to do anything at all about a difficult situation that crops up. I do not believe that that is right. Where such powers are given, they should be carefully defined. The Minister says that he wants some flexibility to deal with a handful of cases. All right, that can be incorporated into the precise area with which the Minister proposes that the Bill should deal. That would be preferable to the bland assertion that any conditions whatever can be produced.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my hon. Friend think that the Minister is throwing money at the problem?

Mr. Cryer: I would not agree that he is throwing money at it, but he could be giving power to the commissioners to produce conditions that make reimbursement difficult. Clearly, that will not be the case if everyone has good will, but occasionally good will is absent. In those circumstances, the commissioners may produce conditions which deny someone a perfectly proper reimbursement. That would be unjust. Any remedy would be difficult to obtain.

This is primary legislation on a fairly narrow matter. That narrowness should be indicated in the Bill, if necessary by an additional few words or a schedule defining what the commissioners can do. That would be entirely preferable. The clause is yet another example of the drafting of broad clauses because the Government want to hand over administrative details. Successive Governments have done it. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) has tabled a perfectly sensible amendment on a narrow point to require that the instruments come before the House. If the conditions were unfair, we would have the opportunity to pray against the instrument and have a debate on it—should we happen to get any time, which is another question entirely. We could then remedy any faults.

In spite of the Minister's explanation, I still find the clause unsatisfactory. Undoubtedly, my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham will also have some comments to make on it.

Dr. Marek: Among Opposition Members there is concern about clause 2. I agree with the remarks of both my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed

[Dr. Marek]

(Mr. Beith) about the amendments. However, these are temporary provisions, and I am mindful of the Financial Secretary's assurance that the commissioners will behave reasonably. I hope that they will.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 11, in page 2, line 13, at end insert

'and within three months of the claim being made'.—*[Dr. Marek.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 21, Noes 115.

Division No. 44] **[12.50 am**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Foster, Derek
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Hood, Jimmy
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Lewis, Terry
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Meale, Alan
Skinner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N.
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Burns, Simon
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Portillo, Michael
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Riddick, Graham
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Dr. Marek: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 2, line 17, leave out subsection (4).

I have tabled the amendment because I am genuinely perplexed. Perhaps the Financial Secretary will explain these matters in simple and lucid terms so that we can all understand them.

Mr. Maude: I cannot guarantee that I can meet the concluding part of the request of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), but I shall endeavour to fulfil the first part.

The amendment would remove subsection (4), which provides for a reimbursement made under the clause to be treated as a repayment for technical purposes under the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act 1866. Strictly this is because the reimbursements made under the clause will not be repayments of stamp duty but equivalent payments. This will not affect the amount that taxpayers receive, only the form of the payments. It is to avoid any possible risk that the legal status of a document that has already been stamped may be prejudiced if stamp duty already paid had to be refunded.

Section 10 of the Exchequer and Audit Departments Act permits the Inland Revenue to deduct tax repayments from the gross revenue that it collects before paying it into the Consolidated Fund. Subsection (4) of the clause is necessary because the reimbursements will technically not be repayments of duty but tantamount to tax repayments. It is sensible, therefore, to deal with them in the same way as tax repayments. There is no question of the Inland Revenue making a payment in a case where no tax has been paid. I hope that that satisfies the hon. Gentleman.

Amendment negatived.

Clauses 2 and 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Lockerbie Bombing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

1.3 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I have obtained a copy of part of an investigation report submitted by the Lockerbie police to the Lord Advocate, Lord Fraser of Carmyllie. The report is significant because it appears to contradict statements made to the House on 14 November by the Foreign Secretary about the Lockerbie bombing. In reply to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) —whose role, in my opinion, in relation to Libya has been serious and honourable throughout—the Foreign Secretary said:

"I deliberately put in that sentence that there was no evidence about the involvement of other Governments."—[*Official Report,* 14 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 1230.]

However, the report, publicly quoted I believe for the first time by me tonight, unambiguously details evidence from the Scottish police which implicates a Syrian-based terrorist organisation. The report is entitled:

"Bombing of Pan Am 103: Interview of Marwan Abdel Razzaq Mufti Khreesat as a suspect."

I should say to the House that I asked Sir William Sutherland, QPM, chief constable of Lothian and Borders, with whose force I have worked in harmony and respect for 30 years as a Member of Parliament, to approach chief constable Esson, and deputy chief constable Orr about the possibility of my talking to them. Understandably, these two police officers and their colleagues in the Scottish police, for whom I have sincere admiration, declined to do so. I would not like colleagues to think that I have been discourteous to the police or critical of them in the face of what is the greatest crime committed against civilians of the western world this decade.

I shall quote from the conclusions of the report, a copy of which I have given to the Foreign Office, together with tonight's speech. It states:

"Evidence could have been led to the fact that after being in Germany for 13 days he [Marwan Khreesat] had not approached Dynacord, which was supposed to be the reason for his visit."

That company was not approached by police until 22 February 1989. I am exceedingly unhappy about the actions of the German police and the CIA and I am sending copies of this debate to the American and German ambassadors.

The long report ends:

"It is possible that the brown suitcase was delivered to another person while Dalkamoni was 'parking his car' and that that suitcase contained another IED (Improvised Explosive Device), and that the suitcase referred to is the brown Samsonite suitcase which contained the IED on PA103.

The IED which was recovered in the Ford Taunus appears to be similar to the IED which destroyed PA103.

A similar device, hidden in a record player, was used on the El Al plane in August 1972, and one Marwan Omar Krisat is still wanted in this connection.

There can be little doubt that Marwan Abdel Razzaq Mufti Khreesat is the bomb-maker for the PfLP-GC, that he was brought to West Germany for that express purpose and there is a possibility that he prepared the IED which destroyed PA103. As such he should not be at liberty but should be closely questioned regarding his activities with a view to tracing his associates in the attack."

Has the Foreign Secretary been shown that document by the Scottish police? Although it was written in 1989, I understand it has never been contradicted or withdrawn. In my discussion of 50 minutes with the courteous Lord Advocate, I gained the impression that for the first 18 months of the inquiry there was substantial information, still relevant, pointing to the involvement of an Iranian and Syrian-based organisation.

Why has the Foreign Secretary been so categorical in ruling out the involvement of other parties when Lord Fraser, the Lord Advocate, has gone out of his way not to rule out the involvement of other states? How does the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) account for the discrepancy between the privately held view of the investigators and the public statement of his Government? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that, contrary to his statement in November, the Government have not ruled out Syrian and Iranian involvement?

I shall quote pages 212 and 213 of David Leppard's excellent book "On the Trail of Terror". It states:

"The commissioning and the inspiration for the bombing came from the Iranians. They commissioned an operation against an American civilian airliner in revenge for the shootdown of the Iranian airbus in the Gulf in July of 1988. The original commission was given to Jibril. Jibril's commission was frustrated because the [West German] unit that was to go against aircraft including American civilian aircraft was arrested.

The CIA has evidence which indicates that Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the president of Iran, knew of the decision and supported it. Just what this evidence is, however, remains a closely guarded intelligence secret. 'It was not a rogue decision', Cannistraro stated. Rafsanjani, he pointed out, was commander-in-chief of the Iranian military in the summer of 1988 when the operation was reportedly commissioned through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard."

How can the Foreign Secretary state that there is no evidence that any Government but Libya was involved when the inquiry is, I understand, actively pursuing all possible evidence? Is he not prejudicing the inquiry by ruling out the possibility of finding new evidence which could lead to the indictment of officials or terrorists from Iran and Syria?

It seems to me that Libya is being used as a sole whipping boy when there was an alliance of elements from Iran, Syria and Libya. Father Patrick Keegans, of 1 Sherwood crescent, Lockerbie—than whom no one had more direct involvement in the tragedy—authorises me to repeat the concerns expressed in his letter to me of 13 January, of which the Foreign Office has a copy. He expresses concern in particular about the telephone conversation between Mrs. Thatcher and President Bush in March 1989, agreeing to "play down" the Lockerbie disaster, and the removal of Syria and Iran from any Lockerbie connection after that telephone call.

I cannot do better than quote the last paragraph of the powerful leader in *The Sunday Times* of 24 November 1991:

"Maybe it has been necessary to be nice to Iran and Syria to secure the release of the remaining hostages in Beirut. It must be more than coincidence that both countries were officially cleared of any Lockerbie involvement just a few days before Terry Waite and Thomas Sutherland were at last released. Our joy at their freedom should be tempered by the shame of the cost: the relatives of the victims of the Lockerbie bomb must now come to terms with the fact that most of those behind the murder of their loved ones are going to get away with it. The cause of justice is being sacrificed on the altar of diplomatic convenience. We will live to regret it."

I find it extraordinary that the prime suspect, as identified by the Scottish police, has not—after three years and some £20 million of taxpayers' money spent on the inquiry—been interviewed. I also find it extraordinary that

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

we appear not to have actively sought information about the suspected involvement of officials, or foreign officials, of the Iranian and Syrian Governments in the conspiracy to blow up a western civilian airliner in the latter half of 1988.

Against that background, I plead with the Government not to embark on sanctions against Libya—let alone another military strike wreaking havoc in Tripoli and Benghazi of the kind that, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), I saw with my own eyes in November. I hope that my hon. Friend will be given time in which to speak tonight.

I was deeply concerned to read a front-page report in this week's *Tribune* by Ian Williams, the paper's United Nations correspondent. He wrote:

"Speculation is growing in the United Nations that John Major and George Bush are looking to fight their 1992 election campaigns on the back of military action against Libya."

That, apparently, is the view of the United Nations in some quarters.

Be it the adopted daughter of President Gaddafi or the daughter of Jim and Jane Swire, it is the innocent who suffer. Dr. Swire is concerned—and who is in a better position to be?—about the cycle of violence that could be unleashed. What we need is a round-table conference with middle eastern countries about the prevention of terrorism. Military action will lead to the tit-for-tat of another Lockerbie. Our time and energies—never mind our money—should be spent on fighting famine and disease throughout the world.

1.12 am

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for allowing me some time in which to speak.

As a person of African descent, I am particularly concerned about the plight of African countries and their peoples. That is why I am so keen to see justice done in the case of Libya. I am also opposed to terrorism, and keen to see the perpetrators of this horrendous crime brought to justice—but not tried by a kangaroo court.

After the Gulf war, President Bush talked about a new world order and about big nations not taking advantage of small ones. He talked about the need for legality, international law and respect for a nation's sovereignty. It is on precisely those points that I wish to dwell. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow spoke about the evidence in the case, but I wish to deal with other matters.

Let me make three points. The first concerns the legal position. The Minister must state the legal basis on which he is acting when he asks the Libyans to hand over two of their nationals. Under which international convention or agreement is he acting?

Under the 1971 Montreal convention, the convention for the suppression of unlawful acts against the safety of civil aviation, unless there is an extradition treaty in force between countries—in this case, between Libya and Britain—Libya is entitled, indeed obliged, to try the offenders under her own domestic law. Article 7 applies, as there is no extradition treaty between Britain and Libya. The article states:

"The Contracting State in the territory of which the alleged offender is found shall, if it does not extradite him, be obliged, without exception whatsoever and whether or not the offence was committed in its territory, to submit the case to its competent authorities for the purpose of prosecution. Those authorities shall take their decision in the same manner as in the case of any ordinary offence of a serious nature under the law of that State."

Furthermore, article 14 of the Montreal convention states:

"Any dispute between two or more Contracting States concerning the interpretation or application of this Convention which cannot be settled through negotiation, shall, at the request of one of them, be submitted to arbitration. If within six months from the date of the request for arbitration the Parties are unable to agree on the organization of the arbitration, any one of those Parties may refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice by request in conformity with the Statute of the Court."

Libya was a signatory to the Montreal convention on 19 February 1974. Britain is also a signatory to the convention.

The Minister will no doubt say that Libya is a terrorist state and therefore put itself outside the Montreal convention. I shall make two points. First, no United Nations body has declared that Libya is a terrorist state. That is something which the United States of America and the United Kingdom Governments alone have said. Secondly, I understand that there are proper and well defined procedures under the Vienna convention by which states that may have transgressed may be dealt with. These have not been utilised in the case of Libya. It is not therefore correct for the Minister to describe Libya as a terrorist state, as he has done, unless of course the British Government have now taken it upon themselves so to designate states unilaterally and arbitrarily, as does the United States.

Since Libya received the warrant from the Lord Advocate, it has acted in accordance with its own domestic law and with international law by appointing a High Court judge who is carrying out an investigation into the charges levelled against the two Libyan citizens. The Minister should state why the Government are not prepared to allow police officers, or other relevant officials, to co-operate with the Libyans in their attempts to deal with the matter, as international law both permits and demands that they do, especially as the articles in the Libyan criminal procedure code, which prohibits the handing over of the men without proper evidence, were set up by the British in 1953. The legal system in Libya has not been altered since that time, I understand. Just as Britain would not hand over its citizens to another country for trial without proper prima facie evidence, neither should Libya be expected to do so.

My second point concerns the position of Malta. The charges laid by the Lord Advocate make much of the Maltese link in the trail that led to the Lockerbie tragedy. Like so much else in the version of events that we have been given, there are grounds for believing that this, too, is open to question. I recently visited Malta and spoke to senior members of the Maltese Government about the Maltese connection in all this. I was told in no uncertain terms that the Maltese Government, who had their own investigating team working alongside the Scottish police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, co-operating with them at every stage and seeing the same evidence, came to a completely different conclusion from them.

In the opinion of the Maltese authorities, the evidence to support a Maltese connection is, at best, very feeble. They had found no evidence to support the United States-United Kingdom assertions that the bomb originated in Malta. The Maltese Government's views

could not be reconciled with the views of the United States and the United Kingdom Governments, despite visits to Malta by the Minister of State, the deputy Attorney-General of the United States and the Lord Advocate.

The Maltese Government believe that the Libyan authorities are acting properly under international law and their own domestic law by investigating the charges laid against the two Libyans and by refusing to extradite them. They are totally opposed to military action or sanctions against Libya. In fact, the Maltese Government felt that, although they did not want it, they would be prepared to consider a request that the Libyans be tried in Malta as a way out of the present impasse, especially as the British and United States Governments claim that the crime originated in Malta. Perhaps the Minister could tell us why the British Government are not prepared to consider that.

My third point concerns the consequences that sanctions or military action would have in the region and the Arab world generally. Since the Gulf war there has been considerable political turmoil in north Africa, especially in Algeria, where the rise in support for fundamentalism has been dramatic. Western economic or military action against Libya will cause further instability in the Maghreb region, which could result in refugees and asylum seekers pouring into Europe as their first port of call to escape political turmoil in their countries. Some people believe that such action by the United States and Britain could play into the hands of fundamentalists in the region.

It should be noted that, to date, the Arab League has unanimously supported the Libyan Government's actions and called for the formation of a joint United Nations and Arab League committee to investigate the matter and for it to be resolved peacefully. That scenario is different from the one that prevailed before and during the Gulf war, when the position of the United States was supported by several Arab countries.

The 1986 bombing of Libya, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow has referred, was an unforgivable episode in international relations that later turned out to have been unjustified. Innocent civilians died. That mistake must not be repeated.

The proper way forward is a full and proper international inquiry into the Lockerbie disaster to establish the truth of what happened. The Libyans have suggested that an inquiry should be held and they would be willing to hand over the two named individuals to any international court set up to try them. In view of the recent miscarriages of justice in British courts and biased reporting in the media, it is questionable whether the two individuals could get a fair trial in Britain. But in Britain we can begin the search for truth and justice by setting up the public inquiry that has been demanded by the United Kingdom Families of Flight 103 campaign. Their courage and steadfastness deserve nothing less.

1.21 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): Hon. Members will recall that on 14 November last year my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a statement in the House in which he reported that a warrant had been obtained by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Advocate in connection with the bombing of Pan Am flight 103. The warrant, backed by a full statement of the facts, was delivered to the Libyan Government by the Italian Government, and a text of it has been placed in the Library.

The House will recall that, on 27 November last year, the Government, with the Governments of France and the United States, made certain requests of the Libyan Government. On the same day, the British and American Governments, in a separate statement, requested the Government of Libya to surrender for trial all those charged with the crime and to accept complete responsibility for the actions of Libyan officials. We further requested the Libyan Government to disclose all that they knew of the offence, including the names of all those responsible, and to allow full access to all witnesses, documents and other material evidence, including the remaining timers. The Libyan Government were also asked to agree to pay appropriate compensation.

Since that time, the Government and the Governments of France and the United States have been assiduous in their respective efforts to persuade the Government of Libya to deliver the two named individuals for trial in Scotland or the United States. I do not suppose that the people of Scotland will have been pleased to have heard the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) describe their judicial procedures as a "kangaroo court".

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that, in a way, the speeches of the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) were a criticism of Dumfries and Galloway police, who have produced conclusive evidence about the culprits in Libya and have been supported entirely by the Lord Advocate, who believes that he can make a firm case against them? To try to shift the guilt to another country is surely a criticism of a police force that has done outstanding work.

Mr. Hogg: I have high regard for the work of the constabulary. It has produced a prima facie case sufficient to justify the issue of a warrant. It is now for the relevant courts, either of Scotland or of the United States, to determine whether the people named in the warrant are guilty or innocent—it being for the prosecution to prove the case beyond reasonable doubt. I share my hon. Friend's respect for the constabulary.

The House will further note that the United Nations Security Council is presently discussing a resolution supporting the decision of the Governments of France, United States and Britain. That resolution condemns the destruction of Pan Am flight 103 and the UTA flight and the resulting loss of lives. It also strongly deplores the fact that the Libyan Government have not yet responded effectively to the requests made of them to co-operate fully in establishing responsibility for those terrorist acts. It urges the Libyan Government immediately to provide a full and positive response to those requests. It urges all states—individually and collectively—to encourage the Libyan Government to respond fully and positively to what has been asked of them.

I turn now to the speeches made by the hon. Members for Linlithgow and Tottenham. Both went into the events in considerable detail. I have no intention of doing so. As they know, two individuals have been named in a warrant. It is our intention that those two individuals should be

[Mr. Hogg]

brought to trial. In such circumstances, it would be wrong for me to comment on the evidence, not least because to do so may prejudice or be thought to prejudice a fair trial.

However, it is no secret that during the first 18 months of the criminal investigation attention was focused largely on the organisation known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command, based in Damascus. When as a result of forensic scientific evidence the facts of the investigation shifted, the investigators did not abandon the material which they had gathered together over the previous 18 months, but careful examination of that material has failed to disclose any evidence which would justify the issue of warrants against nationals of any country other than Libya.

As both hon. Gentlemen may know, I have practised for 20 years at the common law Bar. I know well from personal experience that the police investigate many leads and go down many paths which ultimately take them nowhere. Those responsible for framing criminal proceedings must look at the totality of the evidence assembled at the conclusion of the investigation. It was on the basis of that evidence—the totality of the evidence—reviewed at the conclusion of the proceedings that my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Advocate decided that there was a case for the two named Libyans to answer and he therefore issued the warrants against them. He also decided that there was no sufficient evidence to issue warrants against any other named individuals and, in particular, against individuals serving in Governments other than that of Libya.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister explain his use of the word "sufficient"?

Mr. Hogg: There is no evidence to justify the issue of warrants against anyone other than the two named individuals.

Clearly we cannot exclude the possibility that other persons or Governments were involved because one cannot prove a negative. What I can say to the House is that there is no sufficient evidence to justify making such an allegation in court.

I should like to correct the hon. Gentleman on one point. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not said that Her Majesty's Government have ruled out the involvement of other countries. What he said is what I have just said and what the Lord Advocate had previously said—that the investigation had revealed no evidence of involvement by other countries. As has been said on a number of occasions, if there is such evidence involving officials from other countries we will look at it, and if anybody has such evidence they should pass it on to the investigating authorities.

As to the future, I hope that the Libyan Government will agree to deliver the two named individuals to the courts either of Scotland or of the United States. If the Libyan Government do not agree to do this, we will have to decide what further steps may be necessary. At the moment it would not be appropriate for me to speculate on the nature of those further steps.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow has called for a round-table conference with middle eastern countries to discuss the prevention of terrorism. Indeed, to be fair to him, that is the only thing for which he called. I have to say that that is a wholly inappropriate, not to say inadequate, response to one of the gravest crimes committed in post-war Europe. Two named people are charged with the gravest offences. They should stand trail. They will get a fair trial. It will be for the prosecution to prove the case against them. If there is any reasonable doubt as to their guilt, they will be acquitted. That is the way forward, and I hope that this House will endorse it.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Minister answer the question put by Dr. Jim Swire about how one avoids a cycle of violence being unleashed? If military action is not ruled out—and I get the impression from what the Minister said that it is not ruled out—what does the Minister expect but tit for tat? Should we not recognise that the whole tragedy started with the bombing of Tripoli, with the bombing of the civilian areas of Benghazi, and with the shooting down by the Vincennes, now discovered to have been in Iranian territorial waters, of the Iranian airline?

Mr. Hogg: I have never made any reference to the use of force. I have said here and elsewhere that we seek to persuade the Government of Libya to comply with our request that the two people should be brought to trial before the courts either of Scotland or of the United States. We hope that we shall secure a United Nations resolution underpinning that request. We hope that the Government of Libya will comply. Clearly, if they do not, we shall have to consider our next step. I have not suggested force. I have ruled nothing in and I rule nothing out.

Mr. Bernie Grant: As an ex-lawyer, will the Minister turn his attention to my points about the Montreal convention? Why are the British Government not prepared to follow the procedures laid down in that convention?

Mr. Hogg: Those who framed the Montreal convention never contemplated that the Government of a country in which the individuals—two in this case—would be present would themselves be party to the crime. It is clear nonsense to suggest that——

Mr. Grant: It has not been proved.

Mr. Hogg: I have not suggested that it has been proved. I have said that there is a prima facie case against two individuals who are officials of a Government. That is to say not that they are guilty, but merely that there is a prima facie case in respect of which they should stand trial. It is complete nonsense to say that the Government who employ them should also be the authority that tries them. We all know perfectly well that there is a close identity of interest between the judiciary and the intelligence services in Libya. We all know that the country is a tyranny.

Mr. Dalyell: The Minister has been very good about giving way. If the country is a tyranny, why is it that 5,500 expatriates, British people working there, earning the Minister's bread and butter, my bread and butter and the bread and butter of the rest of us, take a very different view of what they think is an incorrupt and very efficient regime? The fact is that 5,500 of our fellow countrymen, many of them Scottish engineers, are working in Libya. It is simply not good enough to shrug our shoulders and say, "These people knew perfectly well what dangers they were going to." Perhaps they did know, but that is no reason to wash our hands of them. What does the Foreign Office think will happen to them if there is any further military

action? Who would sanction it first? If there were sanctions, it would mean that those people could not come back as they do now. The general pattern is eight weeks in Libya working and two weeks over here seeing the headquarters of their homes and their families.

It is high time that the Foreign Office, if it does not want to talk to the Libyans, at least talked to people such as Dick Morris of Brown and Root and employees of the 36 other British firms that are working in Libya. The Foreign Office should ask them whether they think that what the Minister has described is a sensible way to go about matters. For my part, I am extremely alarmed by the tone of the Minister's reply——

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock on Monday evening, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-seven minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

Sunderland General Hospital

1. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available at the intensive care unit at Sunderland general hospital in *(a)* December 1990 and *(b)* December 1991.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Five beds were available at the intensive care unit throughout both of the months named.

Mr. Mullin: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, for most of last year, only four of the seven beds in the Sunderland intensive care unit were operating, that five are now operating, although there is a staff shortage, and that the future of the fifth bed is not clear? Is he aware also that during that time scale many seriously ill patients had to be turned away and had to go to other hospitals and that patients using the unit had to be taken out of it prematurely so that others more seriously ill could take their place? How does that square with the repeated claim that the national health service is safe in Tory hands?

Mr. Dorrell: It is true that, on occasions last year, there were staff shortages in the intensive care unit at the hospital. The health authority has made it clear that it is initiating an inquiry to establish the levels of staffing and back-up staffing that are necessary to ensure that there are no shortages. I am advised that there were no serious repercussions for any patient at Sunderland general hospital last year.

Mr. Devlin: Is my hon. Friend aware that Sunderland general hospital will receive an investment of £19 million this year, of which £11 million is to be spent on a new acute ward block? That is part of Northern regional health authority's largest-ever capital investment, and it has been brought about by the Government.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the local example in Sunderland of the greatest-ever capital investment programme taking place in the national health service. The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) might have mentioned that the local health authority has committed itself to eliminating all waiting lists of more than 12 months by the end of this calendar year.

HIV Infection

2. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make provisions comparable to those made to haemophiliacs to non-haemophiliacs infected with HIV as a result of national health service blood or tissue transfers.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): We have every sympathy with the plight of those infected with HIV as a result of NHS blood or tissue transfer. However, we have not been persuaded that it would be right to extend the special provision which has been made for the infected haemophiliacs.

Mr. Strang: How can the Minister justify the Government's callous attitude towards those who become HIV positive as a result of national health service treatment? Surely she accepts that the Government were right to provide compensation for haemophiliacs who became infected through contaminated blood factor 8. Surely she must appreciate that there is no logical or moral case for making a distinction between haemophiliacs and non-haemophiliacs in this respect. That is the view of the Haemophilia Society and of the vast majority of hon. Members on both sides of the House. Will the Government think again on this matter?

Mrs. Bottomley: Frankly, I find it extremely difficult to make judgments about any of the 5,451 AIDS sufferers, let alone the 16,828 HIV sufferers. As the hon. Gentleman of all people will know, we must ensure that we have effective, first-rate services for all those suffering from HIV or AIDS. We took the view that the haemophiliacs were a special case: they were doubly disadvantaged because of their hereditary condition and the onset of HIV, which compounded their problems.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: May I press my hon. Friend on this matter? Does she agree that haemophiliacs and others who are given contaminated blood transfusions receive them from the national health service? Does she agree also that we are talking of not one or two people but tens of people? There are more than 1,000 haemophiliacs and nearly 100 others who received contaminated blood transfusions. These major disasters are compounded by the fact that those people believed that the NHS would make them better.

How can my hon. Friend argue that compensation should be given to haemophiliacs because, sadly, they suffered a congenital disease and that a sick person who required a blood transfusion was in a different category? The result is the same—great suffering for the individual and great suffering for his or her family, probably the onset of AIDS and, ultimately, death. In those terms alone, have not the Government and the NHS a moral obligation to do something about the matter?

Mrs. Bottomley: With respect to my hon. Friend, I do not believe that it is ever possible to cut a hard-and-fast line. Any case in which a patient suffers a medical accident is a great tragedy. However, the House debated no-fault compensation and, like the royal commission involved, took the view that it could not be justified. We made a difficult decision, and provided a generous settlement for haemophiliacs. Although my hon. Friend makes persuasive and powerful arguments, I cannot accept that they are convincing reasons for moving the line.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister will be aware from her files that two of the 62 cases are my constituents. Does she accept that it is impossible to explain to them why patients who are haemophiliacs are eligible for compensation but they are not—even though my constituents have the same condition, life expectancy and financial pressures? It is impossible to do that because there is no logic to that argument. If it is difficult to defend where the line is drawn, it may be that the line is drawn in the wrong place and that it should be drawn instead so that it includes all those who were infected because of NHS treatment—not just some.

Mrs. Bottomley: As the House knows, Labour has no difficulty making pledges that would result in untold expenditure. The hon. Gentleman argues for no-fault compensation. Where it can be established that there has been negligence, of course compensation is payable. It is the job of the national health service to provide health care and treatment and to continue developing that treatment. I cannot convince myself or the House that the hon. Gentleman's argument is right or persuasive. I remind the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) that, this year, £200 million will be earmarked especially for those suffering from HIV or AIDS.

EC Health Treatment

3. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce proposals whereby national health service patients could be referred to receive treatment in the EC.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Under current European Community regulations, individual patients may be referred elsewhere in the Community for treatment in certain specified circumstances, with the prior authorisation of the Department.

Mrs. Gorman: Is my hon. Friend aware that some of our European partners, with a very high standard of health care, are offering to perform operations for which there is a demand in this country—such as hip replacement—at competitive prices? One health authority is already negotiating with a French hospital, but it is under the impression that it may not yet make use of that facility. Does my hon. Friend agree that such an arrangement would not only broaden the health services already made available to patients but achieve financial savings that could be ploughed back into the provision of other services?

Mrs. Bottomley: I urge my hon. Friend to examine more carefully the health arrangements in many European Community countries, because Britain is one of the few in which a patient may visit a general practitioner and receive hospital treatment free of charge. That is rare in the rest of the Community. Patients in France are expected to pay 20 per cent. and patients in Belgium up to 25 per cent. of the costs. My hon. Friend should again examine the relative costings. The figures that she gave referred to comparisons with the private sector, not the national health service. I want to ensure that we build on the success of the first six months of NHS reforms so that no one will want to go anywhere but to his or her most immediately available hospital to receive NHS treatment.

Dr. Kumar: Will the Minister make the point that, rather than look for treatment to be provided elsewhere in Europe, the Government should provide hospitals in this country? For the past 10 years, my constituency has been promised a hospital, but no progress has been made.

Mrs. Bottomley: I much regret that such a new Member of Parliament should have picked up the churlish habits of other Labour Members. The hon. Gentleman's constituency includes the South Cleveland NHS trust hospital, which is a first-rate, second-wave trust. As the report produced last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear, patients are getting a first-rate service from NHS hospitals and ever-improving treatment from the hospitals.

Dame Jill Knight: The problem is not just that frequently patients in other European countries have to pay for their treatment. They often receive a far lower standard of care than patients in this country. Is not it a fact that doctors and nurses in France were on strike recently, and that in Italy patients have to ask relatives to bring in food because none is provided by the hospitals? Relatives often have to provide non-medical care as well, and patients have to bring in their own blankets and bed linen. Will my hon. Friend note that I, for one, want to receive the superior care that our patients receive?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I seem to remember being told that the latest policy is to turn water cannon on the nurses; that does not strike me as the most helpful approach.

We do indeed have one of the best health services in the European Community, and my hon. Friend is right to emphasise its strengths. The report that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State produced last week revealed that this year we are due to treat an extra 250,000 patients; we are cutting the number of long "waiters", and creating a service that is responsive to patient needs. Those are all reasons for us to have pride in our health service, rather than denigrating the achievements of all our public-spirited NHS staff.

Mentally Ill People

4. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of community care provision for people with serious mental illness.

Mr. Dorrell: I am today publishing an assessment of the case for hospital hostels for people with serious mental illness. In recent years, we have established the capital loans fund and introduced the mental illness specific grant. My right hon. Friend recently announced that the mental illness specific grant is to be increased by 50 per cent. in the coming year, and he is today announcing that we are doubling the size of the homeless mentally ill programme in London. This programme together provides over £100 million of new money for mental illness services in this country.

Mr. McFall: There could be no more tragically eloquent testimony to the fact that the Government's community care policies have failed than the sight of mentally ill people spilling on to the streets every moment. Although it comes late, I welcome the comment by the Secretary of State for the Environment that that sight is an affront to society.

May I point out, however, that it is not only for the convenience of passing citizens that mentally ill people should be cleared from the streets? What is required is adequate special accommodation, along with the necessary health facilities. Will the Minister give a commitment that there will be no further discharges of patients from long-term hospitals until places have been found for mentally ill patients? Will he also give an assurance——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly, please.

Mr. McFall: Will the Minister give an assurance that mentally ill patients who were ejected before the Government's U-turn will be given a rightful place in society?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in almost every particular. First, he is wrong to assume that the policy to which he refers is espoused only by the Government: until now, there has been a bipartisan commitment to ensuring that mentally ill people receive care and facilities that are properly attuned to their needs.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asked for a change of policy that would ensure that, before people were discharged from long-stay hospitals, proper provision was made for them in the community. That does not require a change of policy; it is the Government's policy. It is our policy that no one should be discharged from long-stay hospitals without the existence of a care programme that defines that person's needs—and, furthermore, naming an individual key worker who will be responsible for ensuring that the person receives the care that he requires.

The fact is that the hon. Gentleman cannot support his assertions on the basis of the available evidence.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that multiple questions lead to multiple answers and take up time.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I warmly welcome my hon. Friend's announcement. Does he accept, however, that —sadly—many of those who are sleeping rough in our cities and elsewhere have indeed been discharged from psychiatric hospitals and have slipped through the care package net? Hundreds more are in our prisons, which are the wrong place for such people. Will my hon. Friend ensure that there is a proper care package, properly drawn up, for every mentally ill patient who is discharged from a psychiatric hospital before such patients are discharged? If that cannot be achieved, will he ensure that psychiatric hospitals do not close until the necessary arrangements can be made?

Mr. Dorrell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the document that we are publishing today on hospital hostels. I agree with him that they have an important role to play in a fully integrated service for mentally ill people, but the House would mislead itself if it believed that those mentally ill people who find themselves on the streets are drawn from those patients who have been discharged from long-term care in hospitals. The great majority of homeless people who are mentally ill have never been in our hospitals. We need to ensure that the management of community care is improved to meet the needs of those who are discharged from hospitals and, more particularly, of those who have never been long-stay patients in our hospitals for the mentally ill.

Mr. Rooker: I welcome without qualification the Minister's statement and confirm that there is a bipartisan approach to this policy. However, we want that policy to be activated and managed. That is the difference between us. We do not want to stand idly by and do nothing. The Minister's announcement—which again I welcome without qualification—comes six years after the Audit Commission's report on care in the community, which in paragraph 28 highlighted the fact that then, six years ago, there were 37,000 fewer mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients than there were 10 years ago but that nobody knew where those who had been discharged were because nobody had done anything to find out what had happened to them. For six years, the Government have not taken a blind bit of notice of the Audit Commission's report. They have allowed their care in the community policy for ex-mental patients to amount to no more than people drifting within a community of hostels, in which one finds people who have fallen through the safety net and ended up homeless on the streets.

Mr. Dorrell: I find myself left wondering, if £100 million of new money is standing idly by, how much an action programme is going to cost the Labour party and when we shall see it properly costed.

Orthopaedic Treatments

5. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what factor *(a)* hip replacements and *(b)* all orthopaedic procedures have increased since 1979.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): The latest figures for 1990-91 show the number of hip replacements up by 54 per cent. from 28,788 to 44,477. Latest information on all orthopaedic procedures from the hospital episode statistics is for 1989-90 and shows an increase of 18 per cent. from 554,000 to 656,000.

Mr. Day: Does my right hon Friend agree that the figures confirm the tremendous advances that have been made in health care since the Conservatives came to power? Does he agree that that is evidenced by the recent successful survey of the national health service? Does my right hon. Friend agree also that the last Labour Government introduced such swingeing real cuts in the health service that, if they were returned to power, it would represent a real threat to those who require advanced orthopaedic treatment?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. That is reflected in the fact that there are now about 100,000 more orthopaedic operations than there were in 1979. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) recently said to the House, rather chillingly, that if Labour were re-elected it would treat the national health service as it did last time. As Mr. Charles Webster, the national health service historian, recently told "Newsnight", that meant a splurge of spending at the beginning that was followed by the most desperate and dangerous cuts ever in the history of the national health service.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: Is my right hon. Friend aware that an enormous number of people in Herefordshire are very grateful for the spectacular increase in knee and hip replacements that has taken place in that health authority's area during the past 10 years? It is an

astonishingly successful programme. However, with a higher age structure, compared with the national average, demand continues to outstrip supply. In view of my right hon. Friend's waiting lists initiative, will he take special cognisance of that point and balance the distribution of that resource to reflect the age structure?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend knows that one of the changes that we are introducing is much fairer funding of health authorities throughout the land to reflect, among other things, the age structure. It is the duty of health authorities to meet the needs of local people by putting the money where it best serves those local needs.

Eye Treatments

6. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for reducing waiting times in respect of eye treatments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We are taking vigorous action to reduce waiting times for hospital treatment in all specialties.

Mr. Hicks: Is my hon. Friend aware that, for many years within the referral area of the Plymouth eye infirmary, people have had to wait excessively long periods not only for an initial eye examination but for subsequent treatment? Will my hon. Friend tell us what action is being taken to improve the position in respect of new staff and new facilities and any benefits that might be derived from the new contractual arrangements?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to say that the ophthalmology specialty in Plymouth hospital has had excessive waiting lists. I am pleased to be able to tell my hon. Friend that the new structures and management priorities of the health service led the health authority to appoint a new ophthalmology consultant last week to provide extra sessions to work through the waiting list. The contracting system to which my hon. Friend referred has made it possible for the health authority to provide extra capacity for the specialty at Exeter hospital which will ensure that the waiting list can be worked off much more quickly than would otherwise be possible. My hon. Friend's constituency experience demonstrates clearly the higher priority now attached to reducing waiting times and the management system that is necessary to deliver that objective.

Mr. Litherland: Is the Minister aware that the new cataract centre at Manchester royal eye hospital is dependent upon private patients to pay the £2 million loan for its refurbishment? Does he agree that that will lead to preferential treatment for private patients and creeping privatisation? Why on earth is his Department so scared of answering questions on this subject?

Mr. Dorrell: That question is not for the Government; it is for the hon. Gentleman and his party to explain to his constituents why it is in the interests of the patients of Manchester to remove private patients from NHS hospitals, to deny the NHS revenue that private patients bring and to deny benefits to NHS patients in general.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend agree that, whether the Opposition like it or not, waiting lists are going down? Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to the doctors, nurses and administrators who have made the reforms, the fundholders and the NHS trusts a success? Will my hon. Friend ask the Opposition whether they will continue to embark upon their policy of abolishing those trusts? If they do not give an answer, will my hon. Friend take the Leader of the Opposition out for an Italian meal?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the deafening silence of the Labour party when last week we announced success in reducing long waits for NHS treatment. The House may be interested to know that, because we were seeking to look at the effect of NHS management reforms over the first six months, we did not draw attention to the fact that the number of people who have been waiting for more than one year on in-patient lists is 37 per cent. down on what it was when we took office in 1979.

Infant Mortality

7. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the infant mortality rate for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Waldegrave: The rate of infant mortality per 1,000 live births in England and Wales has fallen from 11·1 in 1981 to 7·9 in 1990. The complete figures for the past 10 years will be published in the *Official Report*.

Miss Lestor: Although those figures are welcome, is the Minister aware that we do not compare well with our European colleagues and that our declining infant mortality rate is not as good as many of their rates? Also, there are big differences between social classes and regions in this country in terms of the opportunities for children to survive. Does the Minister consider it fair that, if a child is born in East Anglia, it has a far better chance of survival than if it is born in Yorkshire or in my region, where we recently lost five intensive care cots? Is not it right that all children should have access to the latest technology, irrespective of where they live or the poverty of their parents?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not think that it is right for the hon. Lady to knock the national health service in that way. In fact, Britain's figures are rather good. Some in Europe are better than ours, but we are better than some others and very much better than the United States. She will also want to welcome the fact given in answer to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) that the percentage improvement among the poorest groups—what the sociologists call groups 4 and 5—has been greater than that among the higher groups, so the gap is therefore narrowing. That is very welcome.

I recently referred the subject of access to neo-natal facilities to the Clinical Standards Advisory Group, and we recently set up a confidential inquiry into stillbirths and deaths in infancy. We are making steady progress, of which the country should be proud. We should also be proud of the NHS's achievement in that respect.

Mr. Conway: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the improvements made in Shropshire, especially by the maternity unit of the Royal Shrewsbury hospital, where two thirds of the Conway brood were born? Is he aware that that progress has been made not merely because of the skill of the consultants and of the nursing staff but because of the way they work together as a team? Therefore, will

he ensure that the district health authority does not break up that team in order to move it to Telford to try to keep an under-used district general hospital busy?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that steady progress is being made, as my hon. Friend says. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) for having tabled the question, which otherwise the Opposition might have accused me of having planted.

Following is the information:

Infant mortality rates per 1,000 live births: 1981-1990
England and Wales

Year	Rate
1981	11·1
1982	10·8
1983	10·1
1984	9·5
1985	9·4
1986	9·6
1987	9·2
1988	9·0
1989	8·4
1990	7·9

GP Budget Holders

8. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress of budget-holding general practitioner practices.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Government's introduction of general practitioner fundholding has been a clear success, a fact confirmed in the independent academic research undertaken by Professor Glennerster of the London school of economics reported today by the King's Fund.

To allow the advantages of fund holding to be enjoyed by more patients and doctors, I am pleased to announce that we are lowering the list size eligibility criterion from 9,000 patients to 7,000 patients for practices entering the scheme from April 1993.

Sir Anthony Durant: My right hon. Friend's announcement is to be welcomed by GPs who welcome the principle of managing their own funds. It helps the NHS and its patients. Is not it now time that the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) apologised to the House for saying that GPs were not interested in fund holding?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is true that the hon. Lady said in column 687 a couple of years back on 15 March 1990—*[Interruption.]*—that there was "no support among GPs"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: This takes a lot of time.

Mr. Waldegrave: She said that that was the position of all general practitioners of fund-holding practices. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members opposite must get used to the idea that I shall read out what their Front-Bench spokesmen have said about fund holding. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) associated himself with the sentence:

"I'll be surprised if budget holding does not collapse in the first year."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1991; Vol. 187, c. 946.]

He should have the grace to admit that he was wrong and the grace to clear up the muddle that has existed in his ranks since his colleague the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) recently announced that he was going to abolish fund holding. I could not get a straight answer from the hon. Member for Livingston about this. I think that the House needs to know whether he will abolish fund holding in the teeth of opposition from virtually every GP and from the British Medical Association.

Mr. Kennedy: Will not the fact that the percentage of GPs who hold their own budgets still remains a very small fraction of the total number of GPs—even after today's announcement—linked to the nature of the block contract system of an internal market, inevitably mean that, if we are to avoid a two-tier health service in terms of patient referrals, either all GPs must hold their own budgets or none should be budget holders? The present two-tier structure is leading to a two-tier treatment of health.

Mr. Waldegrave: Like those on the Opposition Front Bench, the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) is out of date. Professor Glennerster and others looked at the allegations and found no evidence of a two-tier structure emerging. Professor Glennerster said that it was clear that the benefits won by GP fund holders were swiftly being transferred to the patients of other GPs, which is what we said would happen. I think that the hon. Member, who belongs to a party that is supposed to believe in devolution, might occasionally support a practical piece of devolution.

Mr. John Browne: Will my right hon. Friend accept that GPs were encouraged to introduce computerisation partly by an offer of Government funds to refund the cost of that process and, in districts such as the Wessex health authority, those funds have not been fully forthcoming? Will he agree to allow a carry-over into next year to ensure that those GPs who have introduced computerisation will be compensated by the Government, in accordance with the Government undertaking?

Mr. Waldegrave: I have been to a large number of conferences and met many general practitioners, including many from my hon. Friend's district. I have found no such systematic problems, but if there are specific difficulties in some practices, those involved should discuss them with their regional health authority.

Mrs. Mahon: Why does the Minister continue to misrepresent the views of doctors? Is he aware that the chair of the local British Medical Association branch in Calderdale recently publicly rebuked local Tories who were saying that GPs wanted to become fund holders? Dr. Whittaker had to say that no doctors in Calderdale had applied to become fund holders in either the second or third wave. Is it not about time that the Minister started to represent doctors' views properly?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am tempted to quote Oliver Cromwell and to ask whether the hon. Lady could conceive of the possibility that she might be wrong. I am making the extension because of the pressure from general practitioners who have asked me to extend the list size. People are queuing up to join the voluntary scheme.

Mr. Dykes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the fund-holding system has been a spectacular success—so much so that many of the more trendy, intellectual GPs who were initially sceptical of it now welcome it more and more with open arms? Will my right hon. Friend look

again at some of the procedures for recording, note taking and keeping records, as some GPs say that the system is a little too cumbersome and bureaucratic?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am very sympathetic to comments like that. The scheme will obviously be a permanent and beneficial part of health care in this country but is, I am sure, susceptible to improvement and further development, which I shall promote. My hon. Friend correctly records the honesty of many general practitioners, some of whom were sceptical. At his press conference this morning, Professor Glennerster said that, when he started his investigation, he was sceptical, but that he was converted by the evidence of his own eyes, and what he had seen and heard. I only wish that the Labour party had the same openness of mind.

Mr. Robin Cook: If the Secretary of State does not believe that GP fund holding produces two-tier waiting lists, how can he explain the position in Manchester, where patients of fund holders are given eye treatment in a private wing, while patients of other GPs wait 13 months for an appointment? If that is not queue-jumping, what does the Secretary of State call it? How can he explain the position in Surrey and in St. Albans, where consultants are being placed under pressure by managers to give priority to GP fund holders because they bring extra money? If the Secretary of State does not recognise that as an example of two-tier lists, what will he recognise as such?

I shall answer the Secretary of State's question. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State is getting in practice and asking the questions to which I give the answers at Question Time, as it is a situation to which he shall have to become accustomed. The next Labour Government will end GP fund holding, because we shall not tolerate a two-tier list system in which the length of time a patient waits depends on the size of the GP's budget. There is a phrase for that policy—double standards. The Labour party will clear it out of the NHS.

Mr. Waldegrave: I offer the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) my heartfelt thanks for giving what is almost the first straight answer that I have ever extracted from him. I believe that he has, in a single word, delivered to us the votes of the majority of general practitioners in the country, for which I am most grateful. I urge him to study the remarks of Professor Glennerster, who knows rather more about this matter than he does and has laid the two-tier rumours to rest once and for all.

Nurse Prescribing

9. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made towards permitting nurse prescribing.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Chiselhurst (Mr. Sims) has introduced a private Member's Bill to allow nurse prescribing. It has the Government's full support.

Mr. Fishburn: I thank my hon. Friend. As, only a few months ago, she very charmingly killed a similar measure that I had introduced I doubly welcome her support now. Does she now accept that allowing nurses to write prescriptions against a limited range of medical products is a liberalising measure that peels back one layer of the onion skin in the bureaucracy of health care? Would she care to tell the House the costs and benefits of this measure, which will be welcomed so much by doctors, nurses and, of course, patients?

Mrs. Bottomley: The House and, indeed, the nursing profession are indebted to my hon. Friend, who pioneered this measure in the House. I am very pleased that our hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) is now able to take it forward. We did indeed commission a cost-benefit analysis by Touche Ross. That has been published today, and there is a copy in the Library. It shows that the cost is likely to be about £15 million a year, but the benefits will be improved patient care and a greater ability on the part of community nurses to use their professional skills to the full.

East Cumbria Health Authority

10. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairman of the Northern regional health authority to discuss the financial budget of East Cumbria district health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: I have not discussed East Cumbria's budget with the chairman of the Northern regional health authority. Establishing the budgets of district health authorities is a task delegated to the regional health authority.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister discuss with the regional chairman the formula base that is used for the distribution of money to the districts? Is he happy with the fact that one of the deprivation factors that he has used relates to car ownership? Does he realise that, in rural areas such as East Cumbria, many low-paid people need cars because public transport does not exist? Last year this formula robbed East Cumbria and my constituents of many thousands of pounds. Does not the Minister agree that it will be a travesty if the same formula is used this year and my constituents are therefore robbed of much more money that is needed for health in the area?

Mr. Dorrell: Some of my hon. Friends will be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his advocacy of the rural cause. He raises a subject that he has discussed with me. I have told him that I agree that the way in which the region originally proposed to use car ownership raises some questions that have not yet been answered. That is why the Department has written to the Northern region saying in effect, "We hope you will take account of our reservations in the next year's allocations, either in the formula or in tempering the pace of change where you have yet to satisfy yourselves and us that the adjustment you propose is entirely reliable."

Mr. Jopling: When my hon. Friend meets the chairman of the East Cumbria authority, will he congratulate him warmly on the fact that having, since 1982-83, secured a budget increase, after inflation, of almost 15 per cent. and an increase in front-line staff of about 28 per cent., he has succeeded in securing a yearly increase of 42 per cent. in the number of in-patients and an increase of 152 per cent. in the number of out-patients? That is a very remarkable achievement.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the very distinguished record of that health authority. He might have drawn attention also to the fact that the health

service is planning to spend £36 million on a very substantial capital scheme at the Cumberland infirmary. The health service in East Cumbria is developing fast, to the benefit of all patients—my right hon. Friend's constituents and those of the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew).

Healthy Eating

11. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much is spent by his Department on advice to the public in respect of healthy eating.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: During the current financial year, some £2·7 million will be spent by the Department and the Health Education Authority on healthy eating advice.

Mr. Banks: Is it not time that the Government diverted rather more of their enormous advertising budget into advocating the eating of vegetables to promote health? After all, the Minister is surrounded by a large number of them on the Conservative Benches. If she were interested in such a campaign, she could perhaps use as the model for it our own dear Speaker, whose radiant health and youthfulness make him the perfect epitome of a diet based on vegetarianism.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman's advice should be warmly taken by members of his own party. May I suggest that he directs that advice to those who think that the right way forward is a £500 roadside snack at the Savoy to raise party funds? It may also be helpful to those who dine at Italian restaurants and seem to suffer from Luigi's syndrome.

Sir John Stokes: Is it part of the Government's duty to advise us all on what we should eat? Is my hon. Friend aware that I have lived for a number of years without any such advice, and I cannot believe that it is really necessary?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend's view is worth having. On the whole, the advice is in favour of a balanced and sensible diet, and I think that the public wants facts and not fads.

Mrs. Heal: Why will not the Minister introduce nutritional guidelines for school meals to ensure that the school meals service plays a vital role in child nutrition, as recommended in the Black report a decade ago?

Mrs. Bottomley: We have had the excellent report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, which has been extremely helpful. A great deal of work is being carried out by the Health Education Authority, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ensure that people have simple and effective information about healthy eating, and a great deal is being done on school meals, with the particular help of the wife of our own Secretary of State.

PRIME MINISTER

South Africa

Q1. **Mr. Andrew Hunter** (Basingstoke): To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a further statement on his policies towards South Africa.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): I welcome the meeting of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa in December. The Government will continue to encourage all parties to play a constructive role in the reform process. In order to encourage the growth that the South African economy desperately needs, we shall continue to work for the removal of the remaining economic and financial sanctions.

Mr. Hunter: As many United Kingdom citizens live and own property in South Africa, or in other ways invest there, will my right hon. Friend discuss with President de Klerk the increasing violence there, and seek clarification on how the new South Africa can be built without the effective and practical renunciation of violence by all parties?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the thrust of what my hon. Friend said, and I shall have the opportunity to discuss that with President de Klerk when he visits London early next month. I believe that all parties have a role to play in implementing the peace accord, but of course the South African Government have the primary responsibility for the impartial maintenance of law and order.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Prime Minister throw his full weight behind the proposition that an interim Government should rule South Africa during the transition period to democratic elections? As the situation is so delicate and as negotiations with the CODESA committees are currently under way, will he not—please not—do anything to damage that process by precipitate action on sanctions?

The Prime Minister: On the latter point, I do not think that precipitate action on sanctions is the point at issue. One of the great difficulties faced by the South African Government and people at the moment is the need to see growth in their economy, which runs at present with no growth, as against a population growth of around 3 per cent. a year. That is leading to very real hardship for all the people of South Africa—most notably those in South Africa who have least—so I think that the progressive removal of sanctions is desirable for economic and social reasons, and I hope that that progressive removal of sanctions will take place.

On the earlier part of the hon. Gentleman's question, I wish to see progress made in South Africa. I think that that can best be done through the constitutional conference rather than by remarks from across many hundreds of miles.

Q2. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Banks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is good news that, even in the teeth of an international recession, the Government have achieved reductions in interest rates, which means that the family man with an average, typical mortgage of £30,000 pays £100 a month less? Does not that augur well for the home owner and the property market in 1992?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I do welcome the reductions in interest rates and, of course, in mortgage rates that we have seen. In particular, I welcome the cuts in interest rates which three more building societies have announced this morning. The background of lower interest rates and a continuing reduction in underlying inflation provide what we most need—the opportunity for steady, sustainable, non-inflationary growth.

Mr. Kinnock: Why is the United Kingdom the only economy in the European Community that is in recession?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that a number of European economies either have been in recession or are moving towards recession at precisely the moment when the United Kingdom economy is poised to come out of recession. The right hon. Gentleman will also know that there is a recession in many other parts of the world as a result of the general world trading conditions.

Mr. Kinnock: It is a pity that the Prime Minister did not answer the question that I asked. Perhaps he should refresh himself with the facts. Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland and Italy all have growth rates of over 1 per cent., Spain, Portugal and Holland over 2 per cent., and Germany and Luxembourg over 3 per cent. They are all growing; our economy is shrinking by 2 per cent. Is not that because this country and its people are paying the price for having a Government of unique incompetence?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. Almost every country of the industrial world is experiencing economic problems. French unemployment has now reached its highest level. Unemployment in the United States is at its highest level for five years. In recent months, unemployment has risen in every European Community country except the Netherlands. It is higher than a year ago in every EFTA country and in every G7 country except Japan. The right hon. Gentleman cannot live in a cocoon and overlook those facts.

Mr. Kinnock: On the subject of cocoons, the Prime Minister should acknowledge that the USA, Japan, Australia and Canada are not actually in the European Community. In this country, under his Government, unemployment is going up faster, investment is lower and production has fallen more than in any other European country. Will the right hon. Gentleman answer the question? Why is that happening only in Britain under his Government?

The Prime Minister: The fact of the matter is that it is not, as I have explained to the right hon. Gentleman on many occasions, happening only in this country. If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about unemployment and recession, why does he not acknowledge the impact that his minimum wage would have upon unemployment? Why does he not acknowledge what the £6 billion-worth of cuts in defence would do to employment? Why does he not acknowledge what the impact of his tax on savings would do to investment? Why does he not acknowledge what his strikers charter would do to industrial relations? Why does he not acknowledge what his party's attitude to inward investment would do to jobs in the north-east, in Wales, in Scotland and in many other parts of the country? The policies that the right hon. Gentleman follows will ensure a long-standing and deep recession in this country.

Mr. Riddick: Is my right hon. Friend aware of policy proposals which would introduce a new payroll tax on every job in this country, policy proposals which would reintroduce secondary picketing, and policy proposals which would introduce a minimum wage which would put literally hundreds of thousands of people out of work? Is my right hon. Friend aware that those policy proposals go under the somewhat misleading title of "Labour's help to the unemployed"?

Mr. Speaker: The Prime Minister should answer the first part of that question, but not the second.

The Prime Minister: We have no plans to introduce any such policies. Industry knows that such policies would be absolutely disastrous to it and knows from what source those policies would come, which is why its hostility to the Opposition's policies is so severe.

Q3. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Prime Minister recall that, on 26 February 1991, I met him to discuss the case of my constituent, John Hall, who is seriously ill with leukaemia, an illness contracted while he was serving on Christmas island? At the meeting, the Prime Minister told me of his personal knowledge of the suffering of cancer victims and of their families and friends. He also told the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that he hoped that the matter would be expedited as quickly as possible. Almost a year later, nothing has been done. John Hall has spent the last year receiving chemotherapy and blood transfusions in order to stay alive. Will the Prime Minister please show some compassion and award John Hall and the other nuclear test veterans the compensation that the House and the country believe they richly deserve?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) renders Mr. Hall's case particular assistance in raising it in this fashion. I cannot go into the details of Mr. Hall's case. What I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that the Government are willing to consider any claim where any evidence can be adduced of exposure to radiation. We are conducting a validating study into the background of this, and as soon as it is complete, we can reach a general policy conclusion. Until then, I simply have no evidence on which to base a response to individual cases such as Mr. Hall's.

Q4. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: Has my right hon. Friend had time to consider the tax implications of an extra £35 billion of spending pledges? If any Government were to bring in these pledges, they would either have to dishonour them and thereby deceive the public, or income tax payers at all levels of income would need to cough up and pay more to fund them. Is it not true that spending pledges such as those made by Labour politicians would mean that nothing would happen?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before the Prime Minister answers, let me repeat that a Member must ask questions about matters for which the Prime Minister is responsible; he cannot answer for Labour party policies. Answer the first part, please.

The Prime Minister: The implications of such spending increases are either that borrowing would rise to unprecedented levels, and no doubt interest rates with them, or, alternatively, that taxes would rise to a remarkable extent. It is noteworthy that those who advocate these policies also themselves concede in surveys that they would welcome an increase in the basic rate of tax as well as other tax increases.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister recall that the cause of reconciliation in Northern Ireland was tragically set back in the aftermath of the 1974 election? Will he agree that it would be appalling if we were to allow history to repeat itself after this election? Will he therefore support a cross-party approach to Northern Ireland affairs during the election and unequivocally reject any partisan trading with the Anglo-Irish Agreement in a way that would reverse the peace process after the next election?

The Prime Minister: This party stands four square against terrorism, and we have set out our policies from this Dispatch Box on many occasions. I see no imminent change.

Q5. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 21 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gorman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a diabolical liberty for people to suggest that they can increase people's taxes by the underhand method of raising national insurance contributions, as is proposed by the Labour party? Is it not true that the choice for the British people is between our party, which calls for lower taxes and greater spending by the people, and the Labour party, which wants to take people's money and spend it itself? Is not that robbing Peter to pay Paul?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes her point in her own individual manner. As I have said before, if people advocate spending and tax increases, they should be prepared to defend them. The Labour party knows that its spending and taxation plans have been rumbled—and they dislike it.

Mr. Barron: Is the Prime Minister aware that, this morning, the Selby group of the British Coal Corporation announced more than 1,100 job losses at four coal mines? Will he get his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to take action now, as he has been urged to do by the European Energy Commissioner, to stop pit closures in this country, given that we produce the cheapest deep-mined coal in the European Community? How long will the country continue to lose jobs and to lose access to the great national asset of our coal, given that the Government want to sell off British Coal overnight at a cheap price, for the benefit of the Treasury?

The Prime Minister: I am sorry to hear of the job losses to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but the only secure future for the coal industry or, indeed, for any other industry, is for it to produce something that people want at a price that people can afford. That is the only long-term future for the coal industry.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the House to calm down. I cannot even hear the words, "point of order". I shall take Mr. Andrew Faulds first.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If, in your judgment, Sir, a question is out of order, how can it be in order for the Prime Minister to have a response?

Mr. Speaker: What I said to the Prime Minister was that he should answer that part of the question to him that was in order.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Opposition Members can fully understand why Conservative Members do not want to ask the Prime Minister questions about Government policy, but can you confirm that the purpose and function of Prime Minister's Question Time is to ask the Prime Minister questions about the performance of his Government? Opposition Members would welcome the opportunity to debate Government and Opposition policies during the general election campaign, but, given that the Prime Minister does not have the guts to call an election, can you please ensure that, during the few remaining weeks of the Government's period of office, Prime Minister's Question Time will be used to ask the Prime Minister questions about Government policy?

Mr. Speaker: In my judgment, the election campaign started when we came back from the Christmas recess—*[Interruption.]* Order. It has ever been thus. If the hon. Gentleman will think back to days gone by, he will remember that such questions have been perennial in the few weeks before a general election. However, I say again to the House—and especially to Government Members—that they should ask questions relating to the Prime Minister's responsibility——

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No, please sit down.

The first part of the question that was asked by the hon. Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) was in order, but the second part was out of order, as was the second part of the question asked by his hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick).

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely it is in order for Conservative Members to put various policy options to the Prime Minister, and surely what really provoked the rabble opposite to make such a din is that they are embarrassed at the sound of their own policies.

Mr. Speaker: Outlining options is in order.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Is it not in order for Back Benchers at least to ask the Prime Minister whether the policies that are being promoted by the Opposition will most emphatically not be adopted by this Government? The Opposition are worried about their own policies.

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that options are in order.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Bearing in mind the information given by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and the fact that the news did not come early enough to make a Standing Order 20 application today, I wonder whether, if an application is made for one tomorrow, you will give consideration to enabling the House to discuss this important problem in the mining industry?

Mr. Speaker: It should have been submitted today.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not a fact that for some time now there has been a policy of inspired questions being tabled deliberately with the object of stopping Opposition Members from putting genuine questions? Will you take this up with the usual channels, because it is making a farce of Question Time? You ought to intervene with members of the two Front Benches to sort this out.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot be held responsible for the questions on the Order Paper, provided they are in order. I have no idea whether they have been planted, and I am not responsible for the answers that are given.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In seeking to maintain the quality of debate in the House in the period leading up to the election, is it appropriate or parliamentary for the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) to intimate that the Prime Minister has not got guts, which is tantamount to calling him a coward? I hope that it is not appropriate and that you consider that it does not lead to good quality debate.

Mr. Speaker: To paraphrase "Erskine May", moderation in language is the keynote to good order in the Chamber.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that you, Mr. Speaker, have declared that the election has begun, and as you believe in fairness—your job demands it—I have a solution to the problem of the Tories continually wanting to know all about Labour party policies. We have four Question Times each week. We will have our side on the Tory Benches for two days and their side on these Benches for the other two. Then they can ask as many questions as they like.

Mr. Speaker: That is an ingenious suggestion, but I think that I had better not give my personal views.

Several Hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: We should move on. We have a very heavy day ahead of us.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) pointed out that 1,100 jobs are to go in Yorkshire. A substantial number of them are in my constituency. Therefore, in view of the fact that we cannot have a debate under Standing Order 20, will you prevail upon the Secretary of State for Energy to make a statement so that we can question him on the matter?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that what has been said about this matter, of which I had no knowledge before 12 o'clock, has been heard by the Leader of the House.

I will take one more point of order. I call Mr. Kevin Barron, since he raised the matter.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The British Coal Corporation has got it down to an art now. Anything that it says about job losses is always said after 12 noon, when it is impossible to make an application for a debate. Indeed, it announced the closure of the Grimethorpe fluidised bed programme today, and the press release was marked "Embargoed until 1 pm".

Mr. Speaker: May I stop the hon. Member there?

Mr. Barron: They come in here and use the procedure——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Do I understand that the information came out after 12 o'clock? If that is the case, I would certainly consider an application tomorrow under Standing Order 20, but now we should move on.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has had one opportunity today. We must move on.

Representation of the People (Amendment)

3.39 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law to provide that each parliamentary constituency shall be represented by a woman and by a man; to make a consequential reorganisation of constituency boundaries; and for connected purposes.

I wish to introduce the Bill to enable more women to be elected to the House. It will not have escaped your eagle eye, Mr. Speaker, that the mother of Parliaments consists largely of fathers and that, despite the 64 years in which women have had the vote and the many able women who have put themselves forward for selection as parliamentary candidates, less than 6 per cent. of the Members of the House are women. I do not seek special privileges for women. I simply seek to redress an anomaly in our legislative procedure. That can be done without disturbing the position of any existing Member.

We have women's issues in politics, but we do not have men's issues. That is becuse there is a good number of men in the Chamber who will take up issues relating to men. Because there are relatively few women Members, both political parties pay lip service to the idea of having more women, yet seem unable to achieve that objective.

There is no question but that women make admirable and competent politicians all the way up to the level of Prime Minister. There is no lack of talent among women. In the last decade women have made enormous strides. They are better educated. More of them go to university. They are better trained. As many women as men are now training in most professions. They have better jobs. They earn better salaries and wages. But their representation in the House still does not reflect the fact that half the population are women. In that respect, Parliament is trailing behind public opinion and the reforms which we have seen elsewhere in the community.

My proposal would not mean doubling the number of Members of Parliament, it would not threaten the position of any existing Member, but it would improve the choice for the voter. I propose the introduction of a system whereby each constituency would put up a list of men candidates and a list of women candidates and a voter would have two votes, choosing one from each list. That could easily be achieved by the Boundary Commission amalgamating constituencies so that each constituency would be represented by two Members.

There would be other advantages. If, for example, a person was so small-minded as not to want a woman to represent him, he could still vote for a man. If, on the other hand, someone would rather take up problems with a woman, that person would, under my proposal, eventually have a woman Member to approach. With natural wastage and retirement, it would take three or four elections to achieve that goal.

In Germany, all constituencies have two Members of Parliament, two lists of candidates and two votes. It is common for people in Britain to vote for two or more candidates in local government elections. In the United States each state is represented by two senators, often from different parties, so that there is one Republican and one Democrat. That shows that there is nothing complicated or difficult in what I am proposing.

As I have said, I am not seeking to promote any advantage for women; I simply seek equality. A woman is regarded by many selection committees, for better or worse, as not being the typical Member of Parliament. The image of a Member is still that of a man. We have to overcome that prejudice.

The House should be a mirror reflecting all aspects of society. It should reflect the ambitions, aspirations and concerns of the majority of electors who are women. Although I do not deny that under the Conservative party of the last decade women have made enormous strides, it is still a contentious issue that every time there is an election we have to have special women's areas and policies.

I disagree with positive discrimination. I disagree also with the idea that there should be a Minister for women's affairs. Neither of those matters would be political issues, however, if it were natural for every voter in Britain to have the opportunity on his ballot paper to vote for both a man and a woman. By adopting that approach we would take the issues of women's politics and feminism outside the deliberations of the House.

3.45 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I do not wish to make a long speech, but I cannot allow my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) to get away with this nonsense. As a former teaching colleague of mine said, this is just plain daft. In 22 years in the House I have never heard a more silly proposition put before it. In deference to your successors, Mr. Speaker, who will sit in the Chair and decide, if my hon. Friend's Bill is enacted, whether to call the male Member or the female Member for a constituency, to our constituents and to the Parliament that we all seek to serve, we should quickly throw out the Bill without ceremony.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mrs. Gorman: Mrs. Edwina Currie, Ms. Clare Short, Mr. David Amess, who in the circumstances I propose to be my pair, and myself, Sir.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mrs. Edwina Currie, Ms. Clare Short and Mr. David Amess.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT)

Mrs. Teresa Gorman accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law to provide that each parliamentary constituency shall be represented by a woman and by a man; to make a consequential reorganisation of constituency boundaries; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 31 January and to be printed. [Bill 55.]

Orders of the Day

Asylum Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

3.49 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I note with regret that proposed new clauses 8 and 9 were not selected for debate. New clause 9 dealt with the difficult problem of special care for the unaccompanied children of asylum seekers. That aspect was debated at length in Committee, but was not pressed to a Division after the Minister indicated that he might be having further thoughts.

New clause 8 dealt in effect with the difficult problem confronting London boroughs. About 30,000 asylum-seeking households will come to this country this year, and the majority will arrive in London. That will place a heavy burden on London boroughs. Again, that aspect was discussed at length in Committee, there was no Division, and the Minister indicated that he might have further thoughts.

As those two issues are important, may I have your guidance, Mr. Speaker, as to how one may raise them during today's debate?

Mr. Speaker: They may certainly be raised on Third Reading. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I always examine carefully all amendments that are submitted, and in particular whether any undertakings were definitely given in Committee. I am not required to give the reasons for my selection of amendments, but in the case of new clause 8, new legislation is not required.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There was considerable debate in Committee on the future of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service—particularly in relation to the future provision of advice and representation for those seeking political asylum, but also in respect of broader immigration matters.

Yesterday, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department met the executive committee of UKIAS. There has been considerable press speculation in the last few weeks about UKIAS's future arrangements. It appears that the Government are seeking to establish an autonomous refugee unit that would remain part of UKIAS, but would put the rest of that organisation on notice that unless it agreed to proposals to introduce a new constitution, executive, and management committee, there would be a clear prospect of no future funding for UKIAS.

Mr. Speaker: I am not aware of all those matters, which are for the Government to consider, not me. Those are the very questions that the hon. Gentleman should seek to raise in the debate that will follow. If the Government have made a decision of that kind, there will be opportunities to debate it on the Floor of the House or perhaps in another place.

Mr. Madden: I understand that, Mr. Speaker, but I wondered whether the Under-Secretary had indicated to you when he will make a statement about the Government's proposals for the future of UKIAS and of advice and representation. No amendment relates directly to UKIAS, which is a major pillar on which this squalid Bill rests. That pillar seems to be extremely creaky. When will the Minister tell the House what he has agreed with UKIAS, what will be available to those seeking political asylum in terms of advice and administration, and what is the future of UKIAS? That major organisation seems to be in chaos.

Mr. Speaker: I am not aware of any of that, though I am interested from the point of view of my own constituency. Those questions should be addressed to the Minister. The remarks made by the hon. Gentleman under the guise of a point of order will have been heard by the relevant Ministers on the Front Bench—and no doubt the hon. Gentleman will receive an answer to his questions if he puts them during the debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is not on the same matter.

Mr. Winnick: I merely want your advice, Mr. Speaker. As you may or may not know, I am a former chairman of UKIAS. I am not involved in any way with the organisation now, but its position is a matter of legitimate concern not only to hon. Members who are in the Chamber but to many others who—as you have said, Mr. Speaker—have advised constituents, or their relatives or friends, to go to that organisation.

It would, of course, be helpful if, during our debate on the new clauses, the Minister referred to the discussions that he had yesterday. I realise that that is entirely outside your control, Mr. Speaker, but it would be rather unfortunate if we engaged in a lengthy debate on various clauses without knowing the Government's intentions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) said a number of reports have appeared in the newspapers. We do not know whether those reports are accurate, and—like my hon. Friend—I am in no way involved in any form of mischief-making. The position of UKIAS is very important, and it would help the House a good deal if the Home Secretary or the Minister could tell us whether the matter will be dealt with in our initial debate.

Mr. Speaker: Those are not matters for me, but the hon. Gentleman's remarks may serve as a warning to the Minister that they may be raised in the debate.

New Clause 2

REPRESENTATION AND ADVICE

"—(1) Within three months of this Act receiving the Royal Assent the Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament a report on arrangements made by him for ensuring that persons making a claim for asylum and asylum-seekers (called in this section "applicants") have satisfactory access to advice and representation from advisers and representatives of their choice and where necessary access to independent interpreters.

(2) Such a report shall describe the arrangements made for ensuring that access to advisers and representatives of an applicant's choice is not hindered nor inhibited by the applicant's lack of means, language, age or the fact that the applicant has been detained, and that advice and representation is provided without undue delay."—*[Mr. Hattersley.]*

Brought up and read the First time.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this, we may take new clause 10—

ACCESS TO LEGAL ADVICE—

'.—(1) A person who is in detention at a port of entry, an immigration detention centre, or other premises and is making an asylum claim shall be entitled, if he so requests, to consult a solicitor or adviser of his choice privately at any time.

(2) A custody record shall be kept for a person who is in detention at a port of entry, an immigration detention centre or other premises, and is making an asylum claim.

(3) A request under subsection (1) above and the time at which it was made shall be recorded in the custody record or record of the interview or the appropriate record of detention.

(4) If a person making an asylum claim makes such a request, he must be permitted to consult a solicitor or adviser of his choice as soon as is practicable.

(5) At any interview or hearing in connection with a claim for asylum a person must be permitted to consult a solicitor or adviser of his choice, and must be informed of this entitlement in advance of the interview or hearing, in the language of his choice.'.

Mr. Hattersley: The purpose of the new clause is, or ought to be, wholly uncontentious and wholly unexceptionable. Our intention is simply to ensure that persons seeking asylum in this country are guaranteed adequate legal advice and representation. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could oppose that proposition, or vote against a new clause that literally does no more than lay a requirement on the Government and their successors.

During our previous debate on the Bill, the Opposition took particular exception to many of the legal aspects. The argument was not about the propriety of keeping bogus asylum seekers out of the country; on that, all three parties are united. It was about the legal procedures whereby the process should be carried out.

I am happy to say—this is directly relevant to a measure that concerns legal provision and legal services—that in a number of particulars, all related to the operation of the law, the Government have capitulated over the past few days. The new rules—placed in the Library at midday, I understand, and thus available only to the most perceptive Members and those who read fastest—set out a number of the changes in legal procedures for which we called. Let me give some examples.

The period in which an appeal may be mounted has been increased to 10 days. Applicants who arrive without documents—and who, originally, would be assumed to be fraudulent or trying to break the immigration and asylum regulations—will now be able to advance reasonable explanations of why their documents are deficient. Applicants will not find that the actions of other persons are held against them when they apply to remain here. It appears, at least, that oral hearings—about which we said so much on Second Reading, and about which my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said so much in Committee—are to become more regular and more common. They may even take place invariably; no doubt the Minister will interpret the rules.

All those changes improve the Bill enormously. If I did not welcome them, I might even describe them as a climbdown. I have read with some amusement the comments that the Home Secretary made about our suggestions when we made them on Second Reading three months ago. None the less, although these improvements, or capitulations, are very welcome, they emphasise the basic principle that underlies the new clause: the absolute necessity for the applicant who takes advantage of the improved procedures to be provided with the legal services, counselling and representation that meet his or her needs.

To understand the present position, the House must remind itself of the history of legal representation and of the Government's attitude towards it. On 2 July the Home Secretary told the House that he intended to withdraw legal aid from asylum seekers. The green form scheme was to be abandoned for asylum seekers, particularly asylum seekers facing appeal. He said that the work carried out on behalf of many asylum seekers by solicitors acting under the provisions of the legal aid arrangements was to be carried out entirely by the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, which I cannot bring myself to call "Yewkyass" because it sounds more like a Hittite king than an organisation in Britain in 1992.

4 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and I had the temerity to ask the Home Secretary, after he had made his statement, whether he was sure that that organisation was the best organisation to carry out the work, whether it had the funds to do it, whether it was equipped to do it and whether it was prepared to do it. With typical foolishness, the Home Secretary accused us of casting a slur on UKIAS by even suggesting that it was important to determine whether that was the appropriate organisation to carry out the work.

Today—far from insisting that UKIAS be the sole provider of legal advice for asylum seekers—the Home Secretary proposes to prohibit it from doing any of the work. The Government intend to remove altogether the refugee unit from UKIAS. A letter sent yesterday, and I think also received yesterday, from the Under-Secretary of State to UKIAS is adamant, specific and unequivocal. The grant which covers work done by and for asylum seekers is to be removed. The letter also threatens to transfer all UKIAS grants—that is, for work done with immigration as well as asylum seekers—to a new body.

That new body is not specified in the letter. I understand that the Government have not yet determined what that new body should be. That new body is to be set up, but under what constitution no one knows. All we know is that during the last four months the Government have moved their position by 180 deg. In July, only UKIAS was to be allowed to do the work. Now anybody else, somebody else, an unspecified institution, is to do the work because UKIAS is deficient in every particular.

We have to ask why UKIAS is deemed to be unsuitable to carry out these tasks. I doubt whether the Under-Secretary of State will tell us that it is because of its managerial incompetence, because the chairman of UKIAS is the prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate for the Small Heath division of Birmingham. I suspect that he will say things that are not over-specific and that he will leave us with the general impression that the Home Secretary and his colleagues are simply dissatisfied with the way in which the work might be carried on.

The truth of the matter is very different. The truth is that UKIAS rightly, in my view, stated within hours of the

Home Secretary's statement that it was wholly wrong that one agency should be the exclusive provider of legal assistance to asylum seekers. One might argue that that was very much against its own direct interests. If UKIAS had wanted to enhance its status, or to increase its grant, it might have said, "We will do the work and we shall let nobody else do it." However, UKIAS said—in my view, wholly properly—that in this area it was important that a choice of legal advice should be provided.

Who can argue with the contention that a man or woman, threatened with a return to persecution or death, should have the right to make a choice between different solicitors and different barristers rather than to be allocated legal advice by and from an institution which I very much admire but which in the eyes of many asylum seekers, who have come not from democracies but from tyrannies, is funded by the Government and, therefore, is likely to be biased in the Government's favour? I certainly do not make that accusation against UKIAS. I have had nothing but help from the service in my constituency. The work that it does in Birmingham, the only area in which I have direct experience of its practices, is admirable in every particular.

However, we delude ourselves if we do not admit and understand that when a man or woman comes here from a tyranny or a totalitarian state and applies for asylum, the idea that their case for staying should be argued by an institution that is funded by the Government who are trying to prevent them from staying is a clear deterrent to their accepting the advice and going through the process. That was the view of the Opposition, the Bar, the Law Society and the Commission for Racial Equality. It was also the view of UKIAS, which said simply that it did not believe that it should be given the work exclusively and that the green form scheme legal aid should be preserved. That is why the Government have chosen to take the work away from it.

One option open to the Government was to lose face by admitting that they were wrong in July and saying that, while UKIAS goes on with much of the work, the legal aid green form provision will continue. That would have been the sort of climbdown that the Home Secretary does not enjoy, even though he has become increasingly used to that over the past six months. That, together with the other five capitulations in the regulations, would, I suspect, have been too much for the Home Secretary to swallow. Therefore, the organisation is to have its powers to provide legal assistance for asylum seekers removed and it has been threatened with the total removal of its grant, which would mean that it would virtually come to a halt and be destroyed.

I do not want to detain the House with procedural questions, but there is the question of the letter between the Under-Secretary and UKIAS which was sent yesterday and which will be the subject of some debate as the new clause is discussed. I assume that if the Minister refers to it, that paper, being an official document written by a Minister of the Crown, must be put in the Library and made available to all hon. Members. Anyone who reads the letter will understand that, as was the case in the autumn, the Government are again threatening UKIAS. They are saying, "Do what we require of you, act as our agent, or your grant will be totally removed and your existence will, at least, be threatened, and you will probably be obliterated." That is intolerable for a Government relationship with an agency that spends much of its time arguing against Government decisions on immigration and asylum. The United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service should not be the creature of the Government. Its nature should be independent. That is an example of the standards that are now common under this Government; an agency that they fund has to bend to the Minister's will or its funds are arbitrarily removed.

The Under-Secretary should announce—I doubt whether he will, and it will be left to us to introduce the proper procedures in two or three months—that the Government will bite the bullet and accept the error. He should say that legal aid will continue to be made available to asylum seekers entering this country and appealing against orders for their exclusion. Having made it clear that legal aid will remain, he should then say that UKIAS shall continue to do the work that is freely given to it by asylum seekers who choose the legal route. I do not mind if he also says that he is interested in the central administration of UKIAS or that he wants the Government auditors to keep an eye on how the money is spent. That is a normal, sober and sensible provision when Government grants go to outside agencies. However, the principle is clear: legal aid should remain and a man or woman under threat should be enabled to choose the representation that they think best suits their case.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The right hon. Gentleman talked about choosing representation. It has never been open to an immigrant appellant asylum seeker under ordinary immigration rules to have representation paid for by the state from legal aid, which is what the right hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting. It has always been that representation before a tribunal would be paid for when it was an immigration tribunal, but only through UKIAS. That was the arrangement when the Labour Government were in office. Has the right hon. Gentleman now abandoned that practice and is he saying that UKIAS will no longer have the monopoly of free representation as it does now, or has he confused himself about legal aid and green forms, representation and advice? It sounds as if he has from what he is saying?

Mr. Hattersley: I have not confused myself, but I fear that I have confused the Minister. What I am saying—and what I repeat as my final word—is that we should revert to the system that operated successfully before the Home Secretary's announcement on 2 July. That announcement curtailed the green form scheme, abandoned legal aid——

Mr. Lloyd: I am sorry to intervene again and I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. The green form scheme has not been curtailed. The Home Secretary's statement and the Lord Chancellor's statement contained merely a proposal to the effect that they were considering the idea. It has not been done.

Mr. Hattersley: The statement said categorically that it was the Home Secretary's intention to abandon green forms and legal aid altogether in this matter and to concentrate the entire work on UKIAS. If the Under-Secretary wants to pick me up on my tenses, he is right to say that it was not done then, but it was announced then. That is a distinction of such triviality that it does not profit the House to waste its time on it. The statement made it clear—and I shall read it to the Home Secretary if I get the opportunity to intervene again—that that was the

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Government's firm intention, against which I and my hon. Friends argued. It was an intention which UKIAS resisted, and it is because of that resistance that it is to be disbanded. If the Under-Secretary is saying that the Home Secretary never had any intention of abandoning the legal aid system altogether in this respect, he has only to say that he does not intend to do so now and we shall applaud that decision and expect him to support the new clause.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The Under Secretary's statement was interesting because it seemed to say that the Government are beginning to think again about their express intention to remove the availability of the green form scheme to those who seek to apply for the status of refugee. If that is no longer the Government's intention, that will be broadly and warmly welcomed, not only by the Opposition but by all those outside the House who are concerned about the constitutional implication of the Home Secretary's announcement at that time.

There is an important constitutional issue which should not be forgotten. It should be the right of every person who seeks to avail himself of a remedy available to him in law to have available to him advice that is not only in fact independent but is perceived to be independent. The great problem with what the Government proposed at that time —we look forward to them announcing that they no longer propose it—is that advice from that quarter would not be perceived as being independent. It would not be perceived as being advice on which the refugee or the applicant for refugee status could safely rely.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) made that clear when he referred the Secretary of State and the Minister to the fact that such people are coming from countries in which, very often, the rule of law has been abandoned and where they cannot rely on the protection of the courts or on the independence of the judiciary and the legal system. That makes it all the more important for us with our tradition of respect for the rule of law to be able to offer a service and to hold out a system that guarantees those applicants not only the fact of independent advice but the perception of independent advice. It is absolutely central to our concept of the rule of law and to all that the legal aid system has stood for. To renege on that—to appear to do so—is something that we simply cannot afford, and the House should not allow that to happen.

4.15 pm

Are we to hear from the Minister that we need not fear because, after due reflection, the Government have decided to abandon the proposal or, if not abandoned it, will ensure that the exclusive agency for advice—which particularly relates to the amendment—and/or representation can be relied on as being independent and perceived to be so?

We should be reassured on that issue because to those of us who observe such matters it appears that what is happening to UKIAS is an all-too-clear sign of the fact that when such agencies seek to behave and sound as if they are at arm's length from the Government—giving independent advice and expressing views that are not likely to find favour with the Government, of whatever political persuasion—their grants and functions are at risk— *[Interruption.]* It is all very well the Home Secretary muttering into what might in other circumstances be his beard but what, in fact, are his whiskers, but the perception of the House and the general public is that UKIAS is being punished for having dared to stand up to the Government when they made the proposal that they now seem to be backing out of—to remove the right of access to the green form scheme for those who seek to apply for refugee status.

The public and House are justified in their view. The green form scheme has served this country well, as it has those who seek to utilise our legal system. It would be a tragedy if it were to be denied any groups.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker) *rose*——

Mr. Boateng: I hope that the Home Secretary is rising to assure us that that was never his intention and is not now his proposal. If it will assist him if I continue speaking a little longer, I shall happily do so.

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman earlier claimed that it was the public perception that the Government would cease to fund UKIAS because that organisation did not agree with Government policy. May I make it absolutely clear that it has not been the policy of this Government or any previous Government to undermine the independence of UKIAS and the advice that it gives. All those who have been connected with UKIAS during the past few months will have regretted what has happened to it and its internal difficulties.

Mr. Winnick *indicated assent.*

Mr. Baker: I see that the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who was formerly chairman of UKIAS, is nodding and I am sure that his view is shared by all hon. Members.

The meeting yesterday of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department with UKIAS was positive. It has been alleged that the proposals are politically motivated, but that is not so. I want to make it absolutely clear that the proposals that the Government put to UKIAS yesterday were fully supported by the United Nations convention on refugees. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will shortly tell the House about those proposals.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The debate is useful and should prompt the Minister to give an early report on the state of play of the continuing discussions that he has had with those concerned about the provision of advice and the representation of asylum seekers. It is a late stage in the Bill's proceedings for us to be left in such doubt about the direction of the Government's thinking.

Some would say that it would be more appropriate not to proceed with primary legislation—changing the law so fundamentally, making a change of such substance—until the Government had a clear idea of the procedures that should be built in for the purpose of protecting applicants from the patently oppressive provisions that the Bill encapsulates. However, that is not the way in which the Government proceed. At least, it is not the way in which the Home Office proceeds. The Home Office announces its conclusions and then proceeds to rewrite them during the passage of legislation—and this is no exception.

What has happened can be explained in terms of the Government's uncertainty about the timing of the election. The initial announcements in July had more to do with the possibility of an imminent autumn election than with the need to bring forward precise legislative proposals. Indeed, when the next phase unfolded, an autumn election—a November election—was still an option, but that, too, was snatched away from the Government. No doubt they hoped that answers to the awkward questions raised by Members on both sides of the House would not need to be given before completion of the earlier stages of the Bill. This is a case study on how not to legislate. Indeed, the Home Office could provide us with many examples.

With regard to the substance of the proposal of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), the Government have a duty to give Parliament full answers to all the questions—questions raised in the Standing Committee and at other stages of the Bill—about the advice that will be available. There will not be an opportunity today to discuss in detail a subject that was debated very fully in Committee. I refer to the representation, advice and care that would be available to children coming into the country. The new clause refers to the age of those seeking such help, and it gives the Secretary of State an opportunity to say what particular consideration he has given to the representations made by the Save the Children Fund, the Children's Legal Centre and many other organisations that are concerned about the relatively small number of minors who come in without assistance, very often having been put on international transport by terrified parents anxious to get them out of danger.

There have been reports—one of them appeared in *The Independent* today—of an Ethiopian child whose mother was seeking to avoid his conscription to fight against the Eritrean rebels. No doubt the case has been brought to the attention of the Secretary of State. These are real cases. They give rise to great anxiety, and they merit special and separate Government consideration for vulnerable children—the people whom, above all, this House would wish to protect.

I hope that the Minister will be in a position to announce, in response to this debate, the conclusion of the Lord Chancellor following his announcement about the green form. That proposal has certainly met with uniform hostility from all those in this country concerned with the rule of law and with ensuring that the due process of law is followed.

The ability to obtain advice from professional advisers, or such advisers as the person in need of advice wishes, is an integral part of our judicial system and is essential if we are not to have a legal system very different from that which we have enjoyed in the past.

The Lord Chancellor has certainly been deeply concerned about the extent of increased funding required for legal aid, and quite separate proposals on that subject have been considered by the House on one or two occasions. As a result of the Government's decision, the Lord Chancellor has recently become responsible for the operation of these matters in the magistrates courts, and that may have opened his eyes to difficulties that have hitherto rested with the Home Office.

Great though the difficulties flowing from the expanded legal aid fund are, however, we must not allow the Government to whittle away the long-established rights of vulnerable people coming to our shores. We in this country have a record of concern that must not be diminished in the eyes of those who observe our affairs.

I warmly welcome the new clause and I hope that the Government will use the debate to explain in full where we stand before we proceed any further with the Bill.

Sir Philip Goodhart: I must admit that I am attracted by the part of the new clause that says that the proposed report

"shall describe the arrangements made for ensuring that access to advisers and representatives of an applicant's choice is not hindered nor inhibited by the applicant's . . . age".

Between Christmas and the new year, three unaccompanied Somali children arrived in my constituency. My local social services department has some experience of dealing with both unaccompanied children and Somalis. Somalis make up more than a third of the 89 refugee families, with 216 children, who have recently arrived in Bromley.

The social services department will be hard pressed, however, to find accommodation and adequate medical support for the children. Most of the unaccompanied children who arrive have substantial medical problems which are difficult to diagnose, and distinct linguistic problems arise in their dealings with doctors. There will also be considerable problems in fitting the children into our education system. They have little idea of how to cope with schools and no knowledge of the English language.

While trying to cope with those problems, my social services department cannot possibly hope to provide the children with sensible advice about asylum-seeking procedures. It is important that asylum-seeking children should be assigned special guardians to look after their special needs. If we did that, we would merely be following in the footsteps of our Community partners.

In Denmark, France, Germany, Holland and Italy, unaccompanied refugee children are already allocated a special person who is responsible for looking after their interests, both in terms of care and of asylum procedure. In several Community countries, such as Denmark, France and Holland, all the care and advice expenses of unaccompanied asylum seekers are paid by central Government. In France and Germany, there are special procedures for ensuring that a child's case is dealt with quickly.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to say something about the problem of advice for unaccompanied children. Sadly, the present situation is wholly unsatisfactory. We should follow our Community partners in assigning special advisers to unaccompanied children who arrive on our shores.

4.30 pm

Mr. Hattersley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You, I think, agreed that the letter from the Under-Secretary of State to UKIAS of 20 January, being a document under discussion in this debate and an official Government document, should be placed in the Library of the House of Commons for general observation. That letter is one of a series of letters between the Minister and UKIAS. Do you agree that the entire series should be in the Library for hon. Members' perusal? I am particularly concerned about a letter of 7 October, which actually states in terms that,

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unless UKIAS accepts the Government's policy, its grant will be withdrawn, which is exactly the threat that the Home Secretary has denied was ever made.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Member is putting words in my mouth. I did not make that ruling at all. It is not a state paper; it is correspondence. It has never been the rule for correspondence to be placed in the Library. We have yet to hear from the Under-Secretary of State exactly what the letter contains.

Mr. Winnick: It would have been much better, of course, if we had seen the correspondence over UKIAS, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has said, or if we had had a statement; hence my strong support for the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). If, at the outset, we had had a statement about precisely what the Government intend to do about the funding of UKIAS and the future arrangements of that organisation, we would have been in a better position to debate the subject.

That organisation, with which I was involved—I have already informed the House that I have no involvement at present—has undoubtedly undertaken excellent work since it was set up in 1970. I was very pleased when my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook mentioned that he advised constituents to use the Birmingham office. As my constituency is in the west midlands, I follow the same course. I have had no complaint—none whatsoever—about the work that has been undertaken by the Birmingham office of the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service.

UKIAS was started when the appeal system was introduced on 1 July 1970. Some people have queried whether the organisation is independent. They have asked, "If the organisation is funded by the Government, how can it argue against the Government decisions?" There is no dilemma of course. Other organisations are funded by the Government—citizens advice bureaux, for example. No one questions the integrity of the CAB. Indeed, if there were no Government funding, it would be difficult for that organisation to exist.

The UKIAS was publicly funded and brought into operation as a result of the legislation of a Labour Government and continued by a Conservative Government, but its independence is not questioned, certainly not by Opposition Members. As I have often said, if one questions its independence, one has only to go to a hearing and listen to the UKIAS representative argue the case against the Home Office, and let me know whether the organisation is independent.

So we are not therefore querying the independence of the organisation. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook had any doubts at all, he would hardly advise his constituents to go to the Birmingham office of the UKIAS and nor would I. My right hon. Friend has made that perfectly clear and has taken the opportunity today to praise the integrity of the organisation.

As has been rightly argued by Labour Members, however, if UKIAS is the sole agency and if legal aid is abolished in such cases, people could come to a different conclusion. If people are forced to use UKIAS because there is no alternative, because they have not the financial means, the organisation may well be described as acting on behalf of the Government, however unfair that accusation may be.

This is an important point and it is why, in my view quite rightly, the executive of UKIAS, despite all the internal differences and the rest, unanimously came to the view that it was wrong to take on the work as a sole agency: it believed that, if it so did, its integrity and independence would be compromised.

The crux of the matter in new clause 2 is in the words "representation from advisers and representatives of their choice".

There is no doubt in my mind that, in the large majority of cases in which refugee asylum is being dealt with and in which appeals are to be heard or advice sought on the possibility of making an appeal, UKIAS would be used. But there is a difference between a large majority of people rightly choosing to use UKIAS and a situation in which they had simply no alternative. The statement of the Home Secretary to the House earlier certainly gave the impression that UKIAS would be the sole agency, and that is what we really object to. I hope that the point will be clearly established today that legal aid will be available for people if they so wish.

If the refugee section of UKIAS is not to remain in existence—I have not seen the letter but, as I said earlier, it would have been much better if we knew precisely where we were on this issue—and if there is to be a successor to UKIAS for refugee work, the House is entitled to know what will be the make-up of the organisation, what will be the management body, and what will be its relationship in its fund-raising role with the Government. These are important questions. The reason why UKIAS has had the confidence of most people over nearly 22 years is that everyone has known the position. There has been no secret. It has been funded by the Government—that was made clear from the beginning—and its make-up and internal decision-making has been, as it must be, a matter for the organisation itself.

I deplore some of the disagreements which have arisen in UKIAS. It is not unique: we even have disagreements, so I am told, in political parties from time to time. I deeply regret that some of these differences have come to the fore, and I wish that they could have been avoided. However, that is no reason—I hope that the Home Secretary is listening to my viewpoint—why the organisation should be discontinued. The Home Secretary is nodding.

If we agree that excellent work is being undertaken and that the staff are dedicated people who believe in the importance of their work and who feel an obligation to their clients—otherwise they should not be doing the job in the first place—it would be unfortunate if, because of some internal differences, which I hope will be cleared up—I understand that there is to be a meeting of UKIAS on Wednesday—the Home Secretary came to the view that the organisation itself, leaving aside the refugee section, should be dismantled. I hope that the Home Secretary will make it clear to the House today what he has in mind.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will be able to comment on the activities of some of the charities that are concerned with assisting those who are applicants for refugee status. He may have noticed a recent report in the *News of the World*—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): An authoritative source. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Tebbit: Opposition Front-Bench Members may laugh, but they should take such matters more seriously.

The article related to a gentleman who, in one of his guises, was claiming to be one of my constituents. His name was Mr. Avedila. He had not only an address in my constituency, but 14 other addresses. So far, it has been discovered that he has a total of 15 identities. In each of those identities, he was claiming the maximum benefits available. It appears that, apart from housing benefit amounting to about £400 per week, he was netting some £790 per week in other benefits—in 15 different names. I have conducted some investigations and have found that it is absurdly easy to do that——

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Apart from his anxiety to catch television prime time—perhaps it was an appointment in a television studio that prevented the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) from attending the earlier part of the debate—what on earth has his contribution to do with the new clause? If I am correct in thinking that his comments are out of order, am I also correct in thinking that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will shortly advise the right hon. Gentleman that he is out of order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I must be very careful, but I believe that the right hon. Gentleman is using a particular case to illustrate a general point. So far, I have heard nothing that is out of order.

Mr. Tebbit: Having been a Member of the House for 22 years, I am certain that, if the Chair believed that an hon. Member was out of order, the Chair would say so before being advised in general by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). If you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to advise the hon. Gentleman in a by-line that I have recently returned from my constituency of Chingford, and that that is what delayed me and prevented me from being present earlier.

My specific point relates to an organisation that is called the British Refugee Council which I understand is involved in these matters. Mr. Avedila had 15 letters from the British Refugee Council, all of which held his photograph, in 15 different names. In what I imagine is a standard form, each of those letters states:

> "This is to introduce the above-named refugee who has applied to the Home Office for political asylum. In the meantime we would be grateful if you would consider this letter as evidence of our client's identity"—

all 15 of them.

It seems extraordinarily easy to fool both the authorities and the British Refugee Council, because I am sure that that body was being fooled and was not conniving in such a dishonest trick.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As I do not know the cases to which my right hon. Friend is referring, I am not necessarily sure that the organisations were conned. The letters may be forgeries. I am afraid that we come across forgeries in our police and detection work, and that those letters may be examples of it.

Mr. Tebbit: In that case, I must ask my hon. Friend whether he will investigate whether those letters were forgeries—*[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is as capable of reading the newspapers as I am. I should like him to look into this matter and to tell me what steps he is taking to avoid such a matter recurring.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Will my right hon. Friend accept it from me, as a member of the British Refugee Council, that that most honourable organisation would never connive in any form of illegal activity? Clearly, therefore, there may well have been a forgery, but what has happened would certainly not have been with the knowledge of the British Refugee Council.

Mr. Tebbit: I am grateful to hear that from my hon. Friend. However, what has happened suggests that it is all too easy to make forgeries and to fool the authorities. Perhaps my right hon. Friends could do something to improve the standard of checking such records.

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Tebbit: I think that I can do without the hon. Gentleman's help.

As the House knows, it is extremely easy to obtain false documentation from the authorities. It is extremely easy to obtain false passports or even to have genuine passports issued to people who do not exist.

Mr. Winnick: Where is the evidence?

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Give it to the Home Secretary.

Mr. Tebbit: The Home Secretary is aware of these matters——

Mr. Winnick: Speak to the Chair.

Mr. Tebbit: I am grateful to hear the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) give his hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) the advice that he should speak to the Chair—*[Interruption.]* Well, what is clearly extremely unwelcome to Opposition Members is the fact that there is a large-scale racket, of which Mr. Avedila is but one example of a so-called refugee who seeks to claim that status.

Mr. Vaz *rose*——

4.45 pm

Mr. Tebbit: No, thank you.

If Opposition Members would like me to elaborate at greater length, I could tell them the story of Mr. Williams, who was recently deported. He had been here illegally for about 18 months, during which time he had found gainful employment in the Department of Employment as an employment adjudication officer. In that role, he frequently adjudicated upon his own claims. He then went round at the weekends to collect his benefits from his accommodation addresses, many of which are quite well known. Those are matters about which my right hon. and hon. Friends should be—and, I know, are—concerned.

Mr. Corbyn: First, I must apologise to the House for not being present in the Chamber for some of the earlier speeches. Unfortunately, however, I did hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Given that he served in Cabinet for many years, I should have thought that he would be more objective and would not simply take as his evidence two cases from the front page of the *News of the World*. The right hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Corbyn]

cannot even be bothered to pass on his information to the Home Office or the police, yet he extrapolates from that that there is a massive amount of fraud and a refugee and immigration racket.

For one moment, when the right hon. Gentleman first rose to speak, and given that he will not be standing at the next election, I thought that Daniel had come to judgment and that the right hon. Gentleman was going to show some concern for those who seek asylum in this country and who have fled from oppressive regimes that were supported by the Government of which he was happily a Cabinet member for so many years. Those people have suffered torture and all sorts of indignities and have missing family members.

However, the right hon. Gentleman chose instead to use the race card, which his party is determined to play in the run-up to the election, by extrapolating from those two cases that there is massive fraud in matters relating to refugees, thereby smearing the character of all those who seek asylum in this country, without any thought of the conditions from which they have come.

I might have thought that the right hon. Gentleman would draw the attention of the House to his views on the two new clauses, but I do not recall him even mentioning them. Perhaps he has not read them. Indeed, he does not appear to have a copy of them with him. That seems a strangely ill-prepared way to attend such a debate—without a copy of the Bill or of the *Hansard* of the Standing Committee, with Mr. Speaker's selection of amendments or copies of those amendments.

Mr. Madden: The right hon. Gentleman has the *News of the World.*

Mr. Corbyn: As my hon. Friend has pointed out, the right hon. Gentleman came with a crucial piece of information—the front page of the *News of the World.* We all know where he gets his information.

These new clauses are crucial ones about the right to independent legal advice. I should have thought that the right hon. Member for Chingford, who believes, apparently, in freedom of choice in all matters, would have supported the right of freedom to choose independent legal advice. But he does not do that; instead, he supports the Government's curtailment of that right. He supports the curtailment, apparently, of green-form advice, which I believe is largely motivated by the embarrassment which the Government have suffered from a number of very successful cases that have been mounted against Home Office decisions by law centres and legal aid practices throughout the country. That, I believe, is the motive behind what they are doing.

I believe that an important part of the first of the new clauses tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) is the independence of interpreters. While I am not denigrating individual interpreters working for the immigration service or the Home Office, many of whom work extremely hard and do a very good job, it is essential that those seeking political asylum have an absolute guarantee that the person doing the translating is independent, is fully aware of the importance of an asylum application, is fully familiar with the cases and is somebody whose background has been inquired into to make sure that he or she is not in a position to infiltrate the immigration service and pass information back to the regime from which the individual may be fleeing, thus putting their family at risk.

These are extremely serious matters. Anyone seeking political asylum is taking a major step. People arriving in this country for such a purpose have to go through a long interview procedure to process their claims. While that is being done, their families at home, in Zaire, Somalia, Iran, Iraq, or wherever it may be, are in great danger if the authorities in those countries find out that an asylum application has been made in Europe or anywhere else. We need to know that all those who are taken on as interpreters by the Home Office are responsible people and will not pass back that kind of information.

I heard what the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) said and I share his disappointment and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) that the amendments relating to the rights of the child have not been selected. When a child arrives in this country unaccompanied and seeking political asylum—in some cases, it is extremely obvious why they are seeking political asylum—it is very important that the child is treated properly, as any homeless or friendless child should be treated. We discussed these matters at some length in Committee.

I have had experience of children arriving in this country unaccompanied from Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. They are desperately sad cases. They have come from a war-ravaged country where their parents or friends have thought the best thing to do is to get them on a plane to some safer place. That is not an unreasonable thing to do when one considers the circumstances in which they might be living. They turn up on church doorsteps in inner London hoping that the Church will be able to help them out in some way. Then there is a rather unseemly scramble, with London social services authorities passing the children from one place to another until somebody finally accepts our responsibilities under the Children Act 1989.

What we were looking for in Committee, and what the children's legal aid centre was looking for, was a declaration that the Government's signature to the United Nation convention on the rights of the child would be enshrined in the spirit of law in this country and that there would be independent panels that could look after the welfare of the children to ensure that their welfare was the primary consideration. That surely ought to be what we are discussing today.

These two new clauses are important, and the Government should be able to accept them, because they would ensure a right to independent legal advice and a choice of that advice. I am not condemning the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service or the people who work in it. I am saying that, as an organisation, it cannot cope with the work it has to do at the present time. No organisation could expand as quickly as the new organisation that is to be set up is apparently expected to expand to take on all this work.

I know from first-hand experience about the excellent work that is done by a number of legal aid practices and law centres in supporting asylum applicants. It could well be that the right hon. Member for Chingford and others are so offended by the success of those organisations and the ability of those individuals that they wish to curtail the right of people to seek that independent legal advice. That

seems to me to be completely wrong. We should be supporting the right to seek independent legal advice in support of an asylum application.

Nobody who seeks political asylum does it lightly. It is a very serious step to take, with implications for the individual, his family and the rest of his life. It is not something that people easily embark upon. I think it is time that the House took the issue seriously and guaranteed the right to independent advice.

Mr. Ashby: I do not support the new clause, but I want to bring one aspect of it to my right hon. Friend's attention. It is the need, when an application for asylum is being considered by the special adjudicator, for a second interpreter. Denmark, which I visited to explore this very subject, uses this process. The Danes have made it quite clear—and I accept the arguments and the evidence that they have produced—that a second interpreter is absolutely necessary in the case of an application for leave.

The application for leave is a much more beneficial ground than most other countries in Europe give; it is a much freer ground. In this respect, we are much more generous in this country. But it is really important that there should be another interview with another interpreter, and that it should be before the adjudicator in the application for leave. I see my right hon. Friend shaking his head, but I hope that he will take into account what I have said.

Mr. Vaz: I, too, wish to apologise to the House for not having been present at the start of this debate. I was attending elsewhere to an immigration problem which was based on a misunderstanding between the Home Office and the Foreign Office. That is why I had to spend the last half an hour intervening and telephoning both Departments to try to deal with the problem.

I want first to say something nice about the Under-Secretary of State and, on the record, to thank him for his decision in the case of Younis Patel, who was in prison in Leicester for a number of months. The case was reviewed by the Minister and Mr. Patel was allowed to stay. That is the only nice thing that I propose to say about the hon. Gentleman. That is the only case of the thousands of cases that I have raised with him to which he has said yes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Not true.

Mr. Vaz: Well, perhaps we can count them on the fingers of one hand.

I want to comment briefly on the Government's proposals and to support wholeheartedly the new clauses and amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

I believe that it is a fundamental principle that people should have access to independent legal advice. I make no mention of the crisis with the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service, except to say this. I have referred many immigration cases to that organisation. I believe that until very recently it operated perfectly properly. I have no great attachment to solicitors earning large sums of money dealing with immigration cases. I believe that there are many examples of people having to pay large sums to solicitors who are not experienced in immigration matters to deal with such matters. But until we have a system that allows properly resourced public access to organisations such as UKIAS, we cannot have a system that precludes people from seeking independent legal advice from private firms of solicitors.

The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) may find this surprising, but I deplore the fact that some people who work in counselling services set up those services specifically to rip off people. That is utterly deplorable. If the right hon. Member has the evidence, he should place it before the Home Secretary, the police and other appropriate authorities rather than come here, in the time off that he has from his interviews on Sky, to make wild accusations about everyone involved in immigration matters.

Mr. Winnick: Does not my hon. Friend consider it surprising that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who always wants to lecture us about the rule of law although we certainly need no lectures about it from him, comes to the House with, I think, two cases where crookedness was involved? Instead of taking the cases to the police, as he should have done and as any other hon. Member would have done, and certainly to the Home Office Minister, he found it more appropriate to come to the House and read from *The News of the World* to get as much publicity for himself as he could.

5 pm

Mr. Vaz: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Photocopies or even originals of the *News of the World,* if they remain from last Sunday, are no substitute for evidence being placed before the Home Secretary so that appropriate action could be taken.

Hon. Members who are present all have a constituency interest in immigration. We know from our weekly surgeries the amount of work that immigration problems generate. In many respects we act in the shoes of solicitors and legal advisers because we have gained great experience in dealing with these matters. Rather than refer them to other people, I find myself, as I am sure my colleagues do too, making the basic applications for citizens who come to me in order to save them time, effort and money.

Mr. Ashby: Has not my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) made a powerful case for the use of fingerprints under clause 2? Was not that the main thrust of his observations? There is a very powerful case when a body like the British Refugee Council could be fooled. Is not the hon. Gentleman concerned that the true asylum seeker should be protected so that he is free to make his claim for asylum unhindered by the illegal actions of others who misuse the process?

Mr. Vaz: We are all here to support genuine asylum seekers; that is why we tabled the new clauses. If the new clauses are accepted, we will make sure that genuine asylum seekers will be treated decently and will have access to proper independent legal advice.

Before I was elected to the House, I worked as a solicitor in a law centre in Leicester where I dealt with many immigration cases. Because of my constituency, since election I have continued to deal with them. The anxiety, hardship and distress suffered by people as they wait for decisions from the Home Office are obvious to anyone. We feel very strongly that people should have access to solicitors who have knowledge of immigration

[Mr. Vaz]

law, and who can protect people by explaining the difficult legislation and regulations dealing with immigration policy.

Over the past 12 years immigration policy developed by the Government has become more restrictive and hurts many people. When the Government introduce complicated legislation, it is only right that people should have access to those with basic information about it. UKIAS or another body should be developed on a national basis, with branches in all parts of the country. Certainly I should like to see a branch in Leicester. I do not see why my constituents should have to go to Birmingham or elsewhere to get effective legal advice. If we had such a network, we would be able to withdraw the support which we currently give to private practitioners, but the Minister knows that we cannot do so at this stage because there is no body of effective legal advice and opinion to benefit people.

I make no secret of the fact that we should have a public legal system in Britain, funded by central Government through law centres. Under that system, which we will begin to have under the Labour Government, we would not have to worry about dispensing public funds to private solicitors.

As to interpreters, I do not speak every language of the Indian sub-continent. I need interpreters in my surgery who can speak Punjabi, Urdu and Gujarati, otherwise I cannot understand fully what my constituents are saying when they have complicated immigration problems. It is only right that we should put forward modest proposals to ensure that there is access to interpreters. I understand that even the *The People* has started to produce certain pages in Urdu. If that newspaper recognises the importance of doing so, Parliament should recognise its importance and it should be enshrined in the legislation.

I hope that the Minister will realise that we have made sensible suggestions. They would ease his load by giving people access to proper and effective legal advice. If they had access to interpreters, it would enable his Department speedily to deal with immigration cases.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I should like to intervene only for a moment because I have an important constituency interest in that Gatwick, a major international airport, is within my constituency.

I agree with the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) about the anguish and anxiety caused to people by immigration problems. Inevitably it takes a great deal of time to go into these cases. It is right that they should be dealt with in a humane and honourable manner. In my view, the steps that the Government have taken, and are proposing to take, will in no way diminish the handling of the cases; indeed, I hope that they will speed it up and make it more effective and efficient.

May I pay a tribute to the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd), from whom I have always had the greatest courtesy and the most enormous amount of help in dealing with constituency cases. He takes great trouble over a seemingly endless stream of difficulties. I am grateful to him. I do not recognise in what the hon. Member for Leicester, East said about my hon. Friend any vestige of truth. My hon. Friend has been a staunch ally in trying to resolve difficulties as they have arisen for my constituents.

I should like also to pay tribute to the work of UKIAS at Gatwick. I have absolutely no doubt about its independence. I understand that the statistics show that UKIAS ranks ahead of other people in its success rate at tribunals—not that that is necessarily a good or bad indication, but it is fact. The House need have no anxiety about the independence of UKIAS. I understand the concern that people may feel about the proposed change, but I am content that it should go thus.

As to the unfair and entirely predictable venom that was poured on the head of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) a moment ago, it is increasingly impossible to have a sensible talk about sensitive matters without such abuse. My right hon. Friend was correct and was entitled to raise the case that he did in the House just now. We all saw it in the newspaper and there is great public concern. Many constituents write to me regularly, expressing themselves strongly and loudly of the opinion, or in some cases the fact, that there has been serious abuse of the immigration laws. We all know that it goes on.

All of us who have immigrant populations in our constituencies have become more adept at identifying dodgy lobbying. Over the last nine years, as I have dealt more and more with these matters, I have gained more experience. My right hon. Friend was right to air on the Floor of the House a matter which, however specific—no doubt it is being looked into by the authorities and by the police——

Mr. Vaz: Is it?

Mr. Soames: I am sure that it is.

Mr. Tebbit: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he has said. It enables me to say that I was accused of racism by Labour Members although I had not mentioned the race of the individuals in the two cases to which I referred.

Mr. Vaz: What is it?

Mr. Tebbit: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman a little more about the two individuals, if I may, in a brief intervention. One gentleman has fled the country of his own volition, using yet another identity. The other gentleman to whom I referred, Mr. Williams, was deported some little while ago, it being cheaper to deport him than prosecute him for the gross fraud that he has perpetrated against the United Kingdom.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend makes his own point.

These matters, however disagreeable they may be to raise in an individual context, are discussed in the pubs in my constituency, as they are discussed and debated at the Eton College debating society or the Liverpool polytechnic. Why should they not be aired on the Floor of the House? My right hon. Friend is right to raise in front of the——

Mr. Vaz: We are merely suggesting that if the right hon. Member for Chingford has information he must place it before the appropriate authorities. That is what he should do.

Mr. Soames: As I have said, I have no doubt that, given the scale of the fraud, the matter is being investigated vigorously. I have no shadow of a doubt about that. I am

aware of cases in my constituency—of course they are rare—where the investigating authorities have gone into matters extremely carefully and at great length while being most careful to ensure that there is no publicity that would be likely to lead to prejudice one way or the other. The only point that I seek to make——

Mr. Boateng: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Soames: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not.

I wish only to make the point that I think it wrong that Opposition Members should seek to criticise my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford, who has fairly raised a matter that carries with it considerable concern in all strata of society. It is right that it should be raised on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Boateng: The objection is not that such matters are raised but to the poisonous or venomous manner in which it is done.

Mr. Soames: That is precisely the point that I am trying to make.

I have seen my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford being poisonous or venomous, but neither poison nor venom did I detect when he raised a fair, sensible and extremely important matter that needs to be debated frankly and fully on the Floor of the House without the sort of ignorant, absurd and childish platitudes that we have so recently heard.

I have had regular and extensive contact and dealings with the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service as an ordinary Member who has regularly to deal with immigration matters. I am confident that when I recommend a constituent to see UKIAS he or she will be dealt with in an entirely independent and completely honourable and decent manner. I commend the work of my hon. Friend the Minister in that respect.

5.15 pm

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I start by agreeing with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that asylum seekers should be guaranteed good legal advice and representation. I have considerable sympathy for what the two new clauses seek to do. Before any fluttering expectations begin to arise in the minds or breasts—I do not mind which it is—of Opposition Members, I should say that I cannot advise the House to write the two clauses into the Bill, because they deal, for example, with administrative matters such as a once-off requirement for a report to be made to Parliament—new clause 2—and the keeping of a custody record—new clause 10—that should not be set down in primary legislation. They do so—this comment applies especially to new clause 10—in language that is more absolute then justified or practical. For example, new clause 10 provides an asylum seeker with the entitlement

"to consult a solicitor or advisor of his choice privately at any time."

That would be unexceptionable if "at any time" were changed to "any reasonable time". The right of the asylum seeker to be informed

"in the language of his choice"

is too sweeping, though I accept the general direction of that which is sought. There are some languages that require interpreters to which we do not have ready access, though we always make every effort to ensure that we find an interpreter who speaks the applicant's language or at least one in which he or she is comfortable.

I have given some of the prosaic reasons why the new clauses should not become part of the Bill——

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Minister give way on the provision of interpreters?

Mr. Lloyd: I shall not give way if the hon. Gentleman wishes to ask about that. I shall take up the matter more fully later in my remarks.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): The Minister has referred to what he described as administrative matters that he thinks are not amenable to legislation. He has said that he is in agreement, but with some reservations, about the keeping of custody records and access to a solicitor of the applicant's choice. Will he give an undertaking that he will make administrative arrangements that will equally well put into effect the entitlements that we seek in new clause 10?

Mr. Lloyd: I can give the hon. Gentleman the undertaking—it is of the sort that I gave him in Committee—that I believe that many things should be done with the extra resources that we shall have, and in the context of administrative matters the care of records is relevant. We shall be able to undertake that task more fully and in a better manner in future. It is a matter of priorities. I undertake to examine all these matters to see what we might do. I cannot say that in an administrative context we shall take up every item that appears in the new clauses, at least not in the way that is implied. I am not against the general tenor of that which is sought.

I have set out some of the reasons why the new clauses should not become part of the Bill and now I shall say something about general intention. It is right that, for example, the House should be well informed of the arrangements for advice and representation. It is open to the House to ask for reports, and it can pose questions at any time. I believe that I am being asked a question on my meeting yesterday with the UKIAS executive council, and I have no doubt that other hon. Members have tabled questions. It is my intention to keep hon. Members informed of the temporary arrangements that will be made for the UKIAS refugee unit. This will be done by the best and most helpful means that are available to us, so that the House is kept informed at each stage. I shall deal with that matter more fully in my later remarks.

I look to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook when I say that I am not clear about the precise intention that lies behind the phrase in new clause 2, which refers to

"satisfactory access to advice and representation"—

this is for applicants—

"from advisers and representatives of their choice".

Of course applicants may continue to have advice and representation of their choice; we place no limit on either. The present arrangements for representations are as they were under the Labour Government, which means that publicly funded representation, as opposed to advice, is available only from the UKIAS. Does new clause 2 envisage that legal aid will be extended to representation before the special appellate system takes effect? That would be a fundamental change from the practice of Labour Governments of which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was a member.

Mr. Hattersley: I do not know why the Minister is making such heavy weather of this matter. I suspect that he is doing so because he believed what the Home Secretary said when he intervened. The statement made by the right hon. Gentleman on 2 July included the following two sentences:

"At present advice and assistance but not representation are available to those whose means qualify them under the legal aid green form scheme. We propose that in future advice and assistance, and where necessary representation before the immigrant appellate authority, should instead be provided by the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service."—[*Official Report*, 2 July 1991; Vol. 194, c. 166-67.]

That can mean only that UKIAS was to be made the exclusive provider of legal advice. We are opposed to that. We wish to return to the scheme which was operated and was intended to operate until the Home Secretary made his statement on 2 July.

Mr. Lloyd: The purpose of my question was to extract from the right hon. Gentleman what he thought was meant not by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department but the new clause. When I intervened in the right hon. Gentleman's speech he replied in such confusion that I thought it best to give him time to reflect, and to ask my question again later. Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to abandon the arrangement with which Labour was content when it was last in power? I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can answer that now. Is he saying that free representation—as opposed to advice—paid for out of public funds would continue to be a monopoly of UKIAS or some other similar organisation?

Alternatively, is the right hon. Gentleman implying—as I thought that he was in some of his remarks—that legal aid would be generally available to those appearing before adjudicators or tribunals, and that they could secure representation from any part of the legal profession?

Mr. Hattersley: I was not arguing—and never have argued—for the hypothesis that the Minister irrelevantly introduces. I want to see the status quo—the preservation of the system that the Home Secretary said on 2 July that he intended to abandon. I understood from the Home Secretary's intervention that the total abandonment of the green form scheme was never in the Home Secretary's mind. There is confusion throughout the House about the Under-Secretary's intentions. Does he or does he not propose to abandon the green form scheme totally and completely?

Mr. Lloyd: I am trying to tease from the right hon. Gentleman what he thinks is the meaning of the new clause that he invites the House to adopt. I understand that it would leave the situation exactly as it is now, with green form advice available from a legal practitioner or free from UKIAS—but with representation confined only to UKIAS or any successor body.

As to the Government's position on the green form scheme, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that instead of an arrangement unique to the immigration appellate system, whereby public funds finance two sources of free advice—UKIAS and green form—they were considering concentrating the provision of free advice through UKIAS, so that only that organisation would be publicly funded to give advice.

My noble and learned Friend and my right hon. Friend made it clear that the green form scheme would not be withdrawn until a full, free, prompt, and convenient form of professional advice was available to every asylum seeker. They made it clear also, as they had to do because of the rules by which we work, that no such change could be put into effect without formal consultation and the consent of both Houses. Parliament will decide. The right hon. Gentleman will have ample opportunity to speak his mind and to record his vote if and when my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor brings forward considered proposals on the green form scheme. Until then, green form professional advice will continue to be available.

Mr. Hattersley: It would be churlish of me not to say how much I welcome that statement, and how much I rejoice in the fact that to add to the four climbdowns that I announced at 4 o'clock, there is a fifth—the abandonment of the proposal announced by the Home Secretary in column 167 of *Hansard* on 2 July.

Mr. Lloyd: That proposal is still under serious consideration. *[Laughter.]* We would not make such a large change without formal consultation. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook may laugh. That is how he may see himself operating as Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor, but it is not how this Government's Home Secretary and Lord Chancellor operate. As to the climbdowns to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, they merely reflect the Government's success in putting in writing—and I agree that this was needed in some cases—the Government's intentions, using words that even the right hon. Gentleman could understand.

The timing of yesterday's meeting with UKIAS was not occasioned by either the imminent general election, as was suggested by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), or today's Report stage of the Bill. Because UKIAS's general council will meet tomorrow, I thought that it would be fairer to speak to its executive in advance so that it could report back, rather than have to wait until after tomorrow's general council meeting.

As the House knows—because I have said this before—whatever may be the difficulties, to use the word chosen by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), confronting UKIAS's general council and executive, its full-time staff give excellent and professional advice and representation. However, I have long thought that UKIAS's constitution does not sufficiently bring in the various bodies and professional groups concerned with asylum, effectively rule out conflicting pecuniary interests, or satisfactorily delegate its day-to-day running to its very good, professional, full-time management in the way that a well-run organisation in receipt of public funds ought to do.

For more than a year my officials, and latterly myself, and most particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—whose senior representative attended yesterday's meeting and shares my concerns and objectives—urged on UKIAS the need to introduce constitutional changes to remove the shortcomings that I described and to meet many of the outside criticisms to which UKIAS is subjected.

It is plain that, although there was, and is, wide acceptance of the need for reform within UKIAS, it was too slow in producing results. As I said, we have been talking to UKIAS about the need for reform for more than

a year. I therefore told the organisations's executive that as the refugee section will need to expand to meet the requirements of the new appellate procedure and the increase in asylum applications, which will press upon UKIAS with the new appeal provisions that the Bill introduces, I did not believe it right to permit UKIAS to have large additional funds without the desired constitutional changes being in place.

Accordingly, I gave UKIAS notice that its refugee section would be temporarily detached, to enable its expansion for the time being under the guidance of an independent body to be established in consultation with the UNHCR. I also gave UKIAS three months to introduce the necessary constitutional changes or face the withdrawal of the rest of its grant. I hope that will not be necessary, and that UKIAS will implement the changes needed in a manner that it will be possible to reunite it with its refugee unit. However, the Government will want to be sure that the reformed organisation has the confidence of not only the Home Office but the UNHCR and the various respected bodies active in asylum and general immigration.

I am not acting to rescue a substandard, representational service on which my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sought to place too much reliance earlier this year. I am most emphatically not doing that. I am certainly not acting —as the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) suggests—to make the refugee unit more politically amenable. Even if we were of that mind, the constitutional changes for which we are calling would make that much more difficult.

I should be interested to know whether Labour Members quarrel with any of the three constitutional principles that I indicated. Certainly the UNHCR believes that they are necessary—particularly for an organisation that will inevitably play a much enhanced role as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Fraser: The constitutional principle that we uphold —a principle enshrined in many declarations of human rights—is that people in difficulty should be given the advice of their choice.

5.30 pm

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman giggled when I asked him about representation earlier. Advice and representation will, of course, go together; when a representative appears before an adjudicator or a tribunal, he will make the case in the way that he and his client have agreed is the most sensible. The distinction that the hon. Gentleman makes between advice and representation is not as real as he suggests. Certainly it is not a distinction of principle; it emanates from the practice of the past 24 years. It is because that practice has continued for so long that the very conservative party—conservative with a small "c" —that constitutes the official Opposition is happy with it, and will not question it.

Mr. Boateng: Surely the Minister recognises that at the heart of the green form system is precisely that distinction between advice and representation. The green form system does not cover representation; it is linked specifically with the issue of advice, which is recognised as being entirely distinct and separate from the issue of representation. To confuse the two, as the Minister is doing, is to mislead the House, and to do his own case no service at all.

Mr. Lloyd: Of course representation and advice are different, but they are not as easily separated as the hon. Gentleman implies. I am not speaking to a Bill that would make such changes; I am speaking to a Bill which leaves matters as they are now. I am, however, making an administrative change in the way in which grant is paid to the refugee section, to protect it. I am seeking to safeguard the high quality of UKIAS's representation—especially in regard to asylum applicants—and to enable the refugee section to expand speedily and efficiently. I want it to be able to meet the demands of additional representation that the Bill will confer on it, with the confidence of those who work in the field.

Mr. Maclennan: The Minister has described the hived-off refugee section as desirably independent. How does he propose to ensure that it is so independent of the Government that it is a reliable body in the eyes of those who seek advice?

Mr. Lloyd: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to what I hope will prove to be temporary arrangements. We are consulting the UNHCR closely, and we shall rely heavily on its advice and recommendations: indeed, the UNHCR contributes funds to the refugee unit. It wanted the changes, and we shall not reach conclusions with which it is not happy. I hope that we shall be able to introduce a temporary arrangement that will include the contribution of a range of representatives or individuals who are knowledgeable about the whole system of asylum and immigration, and who will inspire confidence. I thought it right, however, to tell the executive of UKIAS what the Government intended before the UNHCR approached individuals and sensible discussion began.

A number of points have been raised this evening. One concerned the letter that I sent to the chairman of UKIAS. I should be happy for it to be placed in the Library, although I should like to ask the chairman whether he has any objection. I do not see why he should—it merely confirms a meeting—but I feel that I owe him that small courtesy. I have no reason to believe that his agreement will not be forthcoming.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland mentioned timing. I hope that I have made it clear that the Bill does not owe itself to an approaching general election. The changes that I require UKIAS to make in its constitution have nothing to do with that; what they have to do with is the imminence of the large amount of extra money that is to be devoted to the expansion of the refugee unit.

The hon. Gentleman drew my attention to a report in *The Independent* about an Ethiopian boy. I have only just seen that report, and I do not know the background, so I shall make only two observations. It appears that the boy's mother feared that he would be conscripted into the Ethiopian army, so the report obviously dates from some time ago. It is said that the boy was found wandering outside the airport. Certainly he did not say when he arrived that he was seeking asylum; if he was entering the country legitimately—even if he did not mention asylum —he would have needed a visa, as well as an Ethiopian exit visa. That requirement certainly operated then, and I believe that it still does.

[Mr. Lloyd]

I shall need to examine the case further, but it appears to be one of those cases in which a child is brought in by someone, and directed to introduce himself to some organisation. The rule clearly states—and I believe that our immigration officers implement it—that if an unaccompanied child seeks asylum at an airport, that child must be put in touch with the appropriate local authority social services department with a view to his being taken into care.

Mr. Madden: Is the Minister saying that the green form system will continue indefinitely, and that a temporarily detached refugee section will be established? I may not be the only hon. Member who is confused about this. Are we to assume that that body alone will be able to provide representation for political asylum seekers?

As each hour passes, it becomes clearer that a statement should have been made before the Bill reached this stage. I wonder, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether you would consider accepting a motion for the adjournment of the Report stage to enable the Government to get their act together. They need time to make all the temporary arrangements, engage in all the necessary consultations and reach all the decisions that so vitally affect men and women who seek political asylum because they are fleeing violence and persecution. Surely this is a very shabby way in which to respond to the faith that those people have placed in us.

Mr. Lloyd: If the hon. Gentleman had listened more carefully, he would know the answers to his questions. I believe, however, that my response to a later question will clarify the matter further.

As I have said, representation will continue to be available, at public expense, and will be available only through UKIAS or through the detached refugee unit. I have made it crystal clear that the green form system will continue as it is, if and until the Lord Chancellor presents proposals that will be incorporated in a formal consultation document. If, after that, he decides to make a change to the green form system, that change must come before both Houses of Parliament: the system cannot be withdrawn without the approval of Parliament as a whole.

Mr. Vaz: How long with the process take?

Mr. Lloyd: That is not a matter for me. I can only say that it is a considerable way off, because of the clear undertaking given by the Lord Chancellor that absolutely no change would be made until a comprehensive national system of good professional advice was available promptly to all asylum seekers.

That must be some way off. The circumstances in which such a proposition could be put into effect are not with us yet. I realise that the hon. Gentleman would prefer to chat about this matter rather than about the provisions of the Bill. However, it is not in the Bill and it is not proposed to be included in the Bill. It would have to come before the House in another measure.

Mr. Soames: Before the intervention by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) my hon. Friend referred to the care that local authorities provide for children who arrive here in this distressing situation. May I ask him to listen carefully to the representations of the West Sussex county council? Gatwick airport is situated within its boundaries. The county council experiences great difficulty over the care of these children, at enormous additional expense, for which it is not recompensed. Will my hon. Friend consider carefully the recommendations that the county council has already made?

Mr. Lloyd: I shall always consider carefully what those who are involved have to say, but my hon. Friend ought to direct any representations that he wishes to make on behalf of his county council to the Department of Health, which is the sponsoring body in this case. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health is very much concerned about this subject.

Mr. Corbyn: May I remind the Minister that about two years ago a delegation consisting of London local authorities and some London Members of Parliament went to the Department of Health to raise the very same point that the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) has just raised about the costs involved, which they were willingly bearing, in looking after displaced children. However, at the end of it all we got nothing from the Department of Health in terms of additional vital resources that are absolutely necessary if these children are to be cared for properly.

Mr. Lloyd: As I have already said, these are matters for the Department of Health, not for me.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) asked about the availability of advice, irrespective of age, but he is particularly concerned about children, as he demonstrated in Committee. I said to him in Committee that the refugee unit is the right group of people to give legal advice. I have put that matter to the unit and it is considering what might be done in terms of providing advice and help that is especially suitable for children, as well as representation on legal matters and their claim for asylum.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North referred to these difficulties. As I said earlier, he is a distinguished former chairman of UKIAS. I believe that he was also a full-time officer of UKIAS, so he knows very well what good work it does. I hope that UKIAS will be able to continue to give advice on refugee, immigration and representational matters after the constitutional changes have been made, which I hope will remove the difficulties that the hon. Gentleman knows exist.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) referred to a case that he had read about in the newspapers. If I have identified it correctly, it is a case of which we were already well aware and which we were investigating before that report appeared in the newspapers. As my right hon. Friend made his point in this debate, it is not unreasonable that I should briefly reply to it. It has been too easy to defraud the Department of Social Security. That is one of the reasons why we are taking fingerprint powers in the Bill.

We have also made it clear to the DSS—to which it has happily agreed—that the only piece of paper that will justify the Department making social security payments to an asylum seeker is the piece of paper issued by the Home Office with the individual's photograph upon it, as well as a special number. Since that system was introduced last year, about 2,250 asylum seekers—who had not, either through the post or in person, presented documents to us that established their identity—been asked to come in so that their identity could be established. Of those 2,250

people, only 20 per cent. have materialised. That is a measure of the problem that we have to tackle. I do not say that the other 80 per cent. have defrauded anybody, but the integrity of our system needs to be ensured by the provisions contained in the Bill.

I promised the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) that I would return to the point that he raised about interpreters. It is very important that they should be capable interpreters and that they should interpret reliably both ways. We take steps to ensure that immigration service interpreters interpret reliably. Representation is looked after by the refugee unit which has its own interpreters; they are not provided by the Home Office. In court, the refugee unit must provide its own interpreters. It may, however, use the same interpreters as the Home Office uses. There is no copyright on interpreters. Each body is responsible, however, for providing its own interpreters.

5.45 pm

Mr. Corbyn: I raised this important point because I was concerned about the security of those who provide the translation. My point was that somebody who is privy to the interview, as the translator obviously is, must be absolutely reliable. Unless one is completely certain about those people and the quality of their translation, they could pass information back to an oppressive regime that might be extremely dangerous for the family of the asylum seeker.

Mr. Lloyd: We are very much aware of that concern. We take all the steps that we can to ensure that all our staff, including the interpreters, are secure and keep confidential information that could be extremely damaging if it were released.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, North-West (Mr. Ashby) wanted a second interpreter to be provided. I hope, having listened to what he said, that he realises that in almost all cases there will be a second interpreter—certainly it will not be a Home Office interpreter—when the refugee unit represents an individual. That interpreter will have to talk to this individual, look at the papers produced and decide whether the case is the same as that which was presented by the other interpreter.

I thank the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) for his limited personal endorsement. I was interested in what he said about developing UKIAS and his qualified approval of the withdrawal of the green form. Again let me say that the Government have not yet made that decision. All that we are doing is giving serious consideration to an outline proposal.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) for his kind remarks about the UKIAS staff who work at Gatwick. Again I repeat that the advice that the UKIAS field staff give is excellent. The constitutional changes that we expect to make to the organisation are designed to preserve that excellence.

Mr. Fraser: We have listened to criticism of UKIAS, and various proposals and analyses have been put before us. It is a pity and somewhat surprising that, when the Home Secretary made a statement about the ending of the green form advice scheme in July and that when he spoke to the House on Second Reading in October—when he regaled the House with stories about bogus applications, some of which put certain applicants for political asylum in a bad light—he did not use some of his time to tell the House about his concerns and criticisms and in particular about his proposals for the reorganisation of UKIAS. That has been forced out only by this debate that the Opposition have brought about on Report.

It is proper for me to begin by declaring an interest as a partner in a firm of solicitors that deals with some political asylum cases, and a member of the Immigration Law Practitioners Association. Dealing with immigration and political asylum cases is not seen as highly remunerative within the legal profession. It is done by many people as a duty, rather than something that will bring in a great deal of money. There is some misunderstanding—it has not been made clear by the Under-Secretary—that there is a distinction between giving advice and advocacy on appeals. I use the word "advocacy" because it makes the distinction clearer.

There are thousands of cases involving ordinary immigration matters and political asylum applications where advice and assistance is given in presenting the case to the Home Office. It may be a case to stay here as a husband or a political refugee; or, akin to a political refugee, it may be a case involving exceptional leave to remain. Currently, most such cases are dealt with by solicitors and other advice agencies, some of them using the green form scheme.

Thus, it will not be just solicitors who are deprived of the assistance of the green form scheme. About 60 law centres across the country dealing with such work will be deprived of that assistance, as will the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, which will be deprived of that form of Government support for advice and preparation of political asylum applications, and a number of other advice agencies throughout the country, which will be deprived of the assistance of the scheme in processing claims.

Most claims are admitted and approved by the Home Office and do not go to appeal or involve advocacy. It must be made clear that what is being proposed by the Lord Chancellor and Home Secretary is the abolition of green form advice for between 15,000 and 20,000 cases a year, most of which will never involve advocacy or an approach to UKIAS under the present arrangements, and no appeal or representation at that level. The House must be clear about the scale of the abolition of advice and representations made to the Home Office on political asylum cases. The scale of that in no way matches the scale of the appeals that take place.

It is important to understand the wish and need of people claiming political asylum to have a choice of representation and not to be directed towards an organisation which, no matter how good, is seen as being a state monopoly—and in the light of the letter of 7 October, a state monopoly that is amenable to the Government's bullying.

I was asked for my advice on a case this week involving somebody who feared political persecution because they were a Christian. The person was part of a Christian band in a country that is under a dictatorship. The band engaged in acts of evangelism where people would sing and pray against killing, war and violence. That group of people was arrested by a band of soldiers because it was thought that the opposition to killing represented opposition to the country's presidency. A number of them

[Mr. Fraser]

were taken to barracks and beaten. One of them was able to escape and that person—I shall not identify the sex—came to the United Kingdom.

For four years, that person has been in the United Kingdom without making a political asylum application. For the benefit of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), that person has never claimed income support. In fact, that person probably does a part-time, poorly paid job cleaning, perhaps in one of British Telecom's offices. That person has made no claim against the state and there is no question of fraud, duplication or anything of that nature.

That person's concern is not for himself or herself but for their child. The concern is whether the child will be able to survive if the parent is returned to a country under dictatorial rule and is killed or imprisoned. That person has been in so much doubt about whether to make an application that it has taken four years to pluck up courage even to take advice.

I am not criticising UKIAS, but it is important that, in genuine applications of that nature, people should have a choice. They should be able to go somewhere where they believe that their confidence will be respected, which may have been recommended by someone else. That is partly what this is about. In principle, the Under-Secretary agreed that that was incontestable.

New clause 10 ensures that any applicant for political asylum who is in detention should have access to advice from a solicitor or adviser of their choice. The clause fills that out, because it will not work unless the applicant is informed of that right and unless it is underpinned with custody records—that is the experience of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and our ordinary criminal procedures. It does not work unless the interview between the adviser and the person claiming political asylum is conducted in a language that is understood by the applicant. I understand that one cannot provide interpreters for every language, but it is important to choose a language in which the applicant can be understood. I hope that the Under-Secretary will ensure that, even if those provisions are not written into law, they are at least written into our procedures.

New clause 2 seeks to preserve the green form legal advice scheme. It follows that the agreed and incontestable objectives of new clause 10 are impossible to fulfil in practice without the provision of green form advice. New clause 2 is simply a device to get a debate on this subject on to the Order Paper because the Bill is not directly about advice, although it was presented in the context of ending green form advice.

Green form advice costs about £2·85 million a year, and an average of £181 per case. That is not a great deal of money, and it is not possible to charge more than about £50 per case without going to the Legal Aid Board and justifying the additional expenditure. So there are already tight public expenditure controls, and the rate of remuneration is well below that paid to anybody acting in a commercial capacity. There is no possibility of abuse, and the amount of money involved is not high.

Legal advice and assistance underpin the reality of the rights given to applicants for political asylum under the international convention. I say to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) that it is important that vulnerable people, not just adults but children and elderly parents who may have no understanding of the English language or culture, have that underpinning. It is provided now, usually by experts at a low rate of remuneration and a pretty modest overall cost.

The proposal to abolish the green form scheme is mean because it will not save a great deal of money. Even worse, it is vindictive because it is bound to weaken in some way the rights given under the international convention. It begs the question whether the real purpose of the Home Secretary's proposal was not simply a rearrangement of the source of advice, but a way of ensuring that the number of those applying for political asylum is reduced. It is contrary to the spirit of the international convention and to conventions on human rights.

If the scheme is abolished it will rob political asylum applicants of nationwide coverage. In Committee, the Under-Secretary told us that the UKIAS expanded scheme would involve an increase in the number of officers working for the organisation from 23 to 87. That is an extra 64 officers, compared with about 700 specialist firms coupled with advice centres. There is no equation between perhaps 700 and 1,000 observers giving nationwide 24-hour expert coverage and an extra 64 officers working for UKIAS, who are supposed to fulfil the same task.

6 pm

We know that, under the Bill, for the first time, applicants for political asylum who arrive at ports will have rights of appeal—we do not contest that—and those appeals will be dealt with by UKIAS. That is the existing system, but people will have their work cut out in dealing with the appeal aspect, let alone the preparation of the applications, which very often have to be carried out at the ports at short notice and often at unsocial hours and, most importantly, done by people who know what they are talking about and who have some expertise. Abolition of the green form scheme will not only undermine people's rights but destroy the geographic coverage.

Abolition will also unlock the link which was always intended by both Governments between giving advice and applying for legal aid to go to the courts where necessary. What often happens at the moment is that, when someone arrives at a port, an early decision is made to refuse an application for political asylum, and if anything is to be done—whether under the old or the new system—there is a necessity for a judicial review. Abolition will break the link between the lawyer giving advice in the first place and processing the matter within a short time limit to take the matter to a judicial review and the divisional courts. It will abolish what is, as near as damn it, a 24-hour service.

This proposal does not have a single friend. I do not think that one hon. Member has been able to produce a letter, a representation or a delegation from anyone in the United Kingdom in favour of the proposal. Only two people, apart from the Under-Secretary, are in favour of it. One is the Lord Chancellor, represented in the House by the Attorney-General, and the other is the Home Secretary.

I should have thought that the Attorney-General and the Home Secretary were the last people in the world to want to abolish legal advice and assistance. After all, the House was told yesterday that the Attorney-General had spent—I think—£2·1 million on one case. He spent £2·1 million-worth of legal advice and assistance in order to pursue the "Spycatcher" case. That is almost exactly the

same as what is being spent on the green form system which the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor propose to destroy. In view of the Attorney-General's scale of expenditure, he should not be against the scheme.

The other person who should not be against publicly paid legal representation is the Home Secretary, who is not doing too badly for legal advice. The costs of his going to the divisional court will be paid not by him but by a legal aid scheme provided by the Government. His costs in going to the Court of Appeal and of having the best Queen's counsel were paid out of the public purse. When he goes to the House of Lords on his contempt rap, he will receive legal aid. Indeed, the sum involved would keep a very large proportion of the green form scheme in being for a long time.

The proposals are disreputable and they have become more disreputable the more they have been examined. They are disreputable because they deny choice, because the cost at the moment is relatively small, because they involve threats to UKIAS and because they attack and undermine those who are most vulnerable. I hope that the House will uphold our international obligations and our tradition of choice of representation by supporting the new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 219, Noes 301.

Division No. 45] **[6.04 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Cabörn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 3

INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS

'. No power conferred by this Act on the Secretary of State shall be exercised in circumstances where the exercise of the power would be in breach of an international treaty or obligation to which the United Kingdom is a party.'.—*[Mr. Darling.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: New clause 6—Interpretation—

'( ).—(1) In the interpretation or exercise of any provision or power in this Act regard shall be had to the Convention, the Handbook on Procedures on Criteria for Determining Refugee Status as published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees from time to time and the European Convention on Human Rights which came into force on 3rd September 1953.

(2) Where any provision of this Act appears to be inconsistent with the matters set out in subsection (1) above, the Conventions and Handbook shall prevail.'.

Government amendment No. 25.

Mr. Darling: New clauses 3 and 6 and Government amendment No. 25 have a similar effect. In Committee, we were anxious that, when it came to interpretation, regard should be taken of the United Nations convention on refugees and, in particular, the United Nations handbook on refugees which is published for the guidance of those who interpret that convention. There was much debate on that subject and the Minister undertook to reflect on the issue and decide whether the Bill could be suitably amended, and I am glad that he has.

Government amendment No. 25 states that

"nothing in the immigration rules (within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971) shall lay down any practice which would be contrary to the Convention."

I am pleased that the Government tabled the amendment, which means that the legislation will be justiciable so that matters relating to asylum or, more importantly, interpretation and the provision of immigration rules—whether procedural or substantive—would allow an aggrieved applicant the opportunity to argue his case before a court. As we said in Committee, it is certainly our view—and I think that it is the view of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan)—that a declaratory statement of this sort, as well as being novel in our legislation, would be welcome. I am grateful to the Minister for having made the concession.

I do not want to press new clause 3 or new clause 6 to a Division, or to detain the House on this group of amendments. It might be more useful to discuss some of the matters relating to the interpretation of the rules, and we shall have an opportunity to do that in the debate on the next group of amendments.

Mr. Maclennan: I should like to thank the Minister for the Government amendment. It is a useful attempt to deal with a point that I raised in Committee—the compatibility of the immigration rules with our international obligations, particularly those under the international convention. However, I am not sure that the drafting of the amendment is entirely felicitous. The new provision could be understood as indicating to a court that the intention was that the immigration rules should conform with the provisions of the convention. I am afraid, however, that a slightly different interpretation might be placed upon the language: that the declaratory intention has not necessarily been given effect and that the rules themselves will take precedence over the statutory provisions. I hope that I am wrong. It may be that if the rules were independently adjudged to be contrary to the convention the Government's proposed provision would be binding and that the rule would be invalidated. No doubt the Minister will want to deal with the point.

Parliament cannot bind its successors, but in this respect rules that do not have the full force of law as prescribed by Parliament may be somewhat different. In other words, I am not sure whether, if there were a conflict between the convention and the rules as amended, the rules would prevail or whether this provision would ensure that they did not.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I welcome amendment No. 25 very much because it makes clear beyond doubt that there is no basis of any kind for the various scurrilous newspaper articles suggesting that genuine refugees might be sent back, in breach of United Nations convention obligations. I should like to quote from an article by Caroline Moorhead in *The Independent* of 18 November. It set off a flood of letters attacking the Government for their inhumanity. The letters, some of which have reached me, are completely without foundation, as I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will indicate. Caroline Moorhead, in her article, says:

"At least 2,000 victims of torture who have managed to get temporary permission to remain in Britain are faced with deportation—and possible further torture—if the Asylum Bill becomes law."

The article goes on to say that if the Bill is passed those who have been granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom

"can, in theory, be picked up, detained . . . and deported."

The writer of the article appears to rely heavily on advice given by the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, which says that the Bill poses grave dangers. The article goes on:

"Precisely what form it will take is not clear, since no attempt has been made to spell out the Bill's consequences. But inherent in its proposals is the possibility that people who fled their country after persistent brutality may again find themselves facing it."

Later the article says:

"Since it is planned to make the legislation retrospective, and most of the foundation's clients are on Temporary Admission or Exceptional Leave to Remain, there is hardly a person on its books not at risk of deportation."

Mr. Darling: I welcome the hon. and learned Gentleman's contribution. He looks as though he has just returned from a busy day in court. Does he accept that the article from which he has quoted was written before the Government tabled their amendments? Those amendments meet some of the points that the article makes. However, the author of the article cannot be faulted for having raised these concerns. None of the matters had been discussed in Committee, let alone on Report.

Mr. Lawrence: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. However, the letters to which I have referred are still circulating. It appears that the message that went out during the Committee stage has not reached the people who seem to be very concerned about the matter. That being the case, it is all the more important that we take this opportunity to send the message loud and clear to everyone. Everybody has the highest regard for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, which does exceptional work. I am sure that all its intentions are good, but it does not seem to be above a little bit of scurrility.

I hope that my hon. Friend will take this opportunity —undoubtedly the umpteenth, as has been indicated—to make several points. First, he should make it clear that the immigration authorities give the most scrupulous

[Mr. Lawrence]

attention to the opinion of the foundation that any person is a genuine refugee and would refuse to accept its advice only if there were cogent evidence to the contrary.

When I raised this matter with the Department early in December I was given an example of the kind of case in which the advice of the medical foundation was not taken. The House may be interested in that example. It concerns a Zairean asylum seeker who claimed to have been severely beaten while in detention. The foundation's report concluded that scars on his body were entirely consistent with that claim. The Home Office commissioned independent medical advisers, who said that there was clear evidence that the applicant had been physically maltreated but that there was no particular evidence that the maltreatment had occurred recently in Zaire. There was some ambiguity about the medical evidence.

The immigration authorities, however, considered the story implausible for other reasons. In the luggage of the asylum seeker, who claimed that he had been tortured by the Zairean authorities, were five blank Zairean birth certificates bearing official signatures and an incomplete and unsigned Zairean passport in a name other than his. That seemed to suggest skulduggery rather than that the person was a genuine asylum seeker. Notwithstanding that, the applicant was granted exceptional leave to remain. The Department made it clear to me, however —and this was probably good sense—that he was given exceptional leave not solely on the basis of the medical evidence.

6.30 pm

Secondly, will my hon. Friend confirm that, where there is evidence of recent torture, a person will be treated as a genuine asylum seeker? If scars are so old that they cannot have been caused recently by the regime against which a person is complaining, or if there are other reasons to doubt whether the scars were caused by torture, as opposed to a fight or personal dispute, it may be another matter: the person may not be in genuine fear of persecution. I do not think that we should rule out the reasonable consideration of all the circumstances.

Thirdly, will my hon. Friend confirm that no refugee who has been given leave to stay in the United Kingdom for humanitarian reasons will be placed at risk of deportation as a result of the Bill?

Finally, will my hon. Friend confirm that the article to which I alluded is misleading about the Government's approach to the political activities of asylum seekers? Of course asylum seekers have the right to free speech and political association, just like everyone else in this country, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reiterate the point that, if someone who has absolutely no history of political association stands up in front of a camera and says something offensive to the regime back home, for the sole purpose of being able to say, "I cannot go back because I have offended the regime," he is making a mockery of the rules. Only in those circumstances have the Government said that the way in which a person makes such statements and assertions can and should be taken into consideration before a final judgment is made.

I am delighted that hon. Members on both sides of the House seem to agree that the kind of criticism levelled against the Bill before its Committee stage no longer has any foundation—if it ever did—and I hope we shall be able to make clear beyond peradventure the ridiculous nature of such scurrilous comments.

The Government amendment seems to have everyone's approval. I hope that my hon. Friend will kindly confirm my assertions so that we can safely put to bed all the misrepresentations of the Government's intentions and so that we can all be happy.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I do not believe that either the new clauses or Government amendment No. 25 are strictly necessary. The Government do not take on commitments that they do not, in good faith, intend to keep—nor do they exercise their commitments in a way that conflicts with our international obligations. It could be argued that there is a whole range of obligations relevant to the Bill besides the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees and the 1953 European convention on human rights, to which the new clauses refer. I suspect that if we made a list of them and inserted them into the Bill, the only practical result would be to provide pegs on which to hang more or less obscure arguments for judicial review. I do not believe that that would assist the asylum seeker with a well-founded fear of persecution. It would certainly complicate and delay the procedures for determining applications fairly that the Bill was designed to speed up.

We shall come to debate the International Labour Organisation convention and the European social charter in connection with the final group of amendments, so I shall not mention them now; indeed, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) was brief, I shall not say a great deal more myself.

As the United Nations convention is central to the Bill, I undertook in Committee to consider transferring from the rules the words that make it clear that nothing in those rules—which have to be made under the Immigration Act 1971—shall lay down any practice that would be contrary to the convention. Amendment No. 25 does precisely that, and I am glad that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central welcomes it.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) also welcomed the amendment in general, but asked me a specific question. I believe that his worries are unfounded, but I shall re-examine the amendment and make quite sure that it does what it is intended to do. I believe that the amendment means that any rule that was in breach of the United Nations convention would be ultra vires and that the court would rule it unlawful were it brought before it.

I welcomed the intervention of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) because he produced useful correctives to some of the things said by some groups, not least the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. My hon. and learned Friend referred in particular to the Moorhead article, which was deeply misinformed, caused a lot of unnecessary worry and work and wasted a great deal of newsprint.

My hon. and learned Friend wanted assurances on four matters—first, that the Government always pay close attention to the medical foundation's reports. I can assure him that we always do, but people can have marks or wounds on their bodies for many reasons and there can be various interpretations of the way in which they have come by them. We have to make our decision not merely on the basis of a report saying that the marks are consistent with

one form of treatment but on the basis of the other evidence that we have about the antecedents of the particular individual claiming asylum.

My hon. and learned Friend asked whether signs of recent torture could mean that the person was a genuine asylum seeker. I forget exactly how he worded his question. Signs of recent torture constitute very convincing evidence that someone is genuine, but, in deciding whether to grant asylum, we must ask ourselves whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution if he returns home. The fact that someone has been deliberately injured by another person is not conclusive, but it goes a long way to establishing a claim if the other evidence suggests that he would have fear of persecution if we sent him back to where he came from.

It has been suggested—I believe in the article by Caroline Moorhead—that, because of the measures in the Bill, people who have been given leave to remain will be put at risk of being sent away again. Nothing in the Bill alters their situation. Those who have been given exceptional leave to remain must apply to have that leave renewed, but that happens under existing law. The difference will be that if, for some reason, that person's leave is not renewed—which would not be as a result of the Bill—the Bill would ensure that he had the right of appeal to the special adjudication authority in respect to his turned-down asylum claim. That is the only respect in which the position of someone given leave to remain in Britain temporarily or indefinitely—certainly temporarily—can be altered, and it is a change to that person's advantage.

My hon. and learned Friend asked me how behaviour in this country could bear upon someone's asylum claim. A person's behaviour can bear only on his credibility, not on the objective question whether he has a well-founded fear of persecution if he were to return home. Often, those matters turn, at least in part, on the credibility of an individual. That credibility is certainly undermined if a person indulges in activities in this country which are inconsistent with his previous activities and are calculated to create for him an asylum claim or to enhance one that he already has. The matter goes to credibility; it does not go to the final decision. Because it is a factor in credibility, it seems only fair and honest to say so in the rules.

There are few cases in which credibility is undermined in that way, but there have been a number in which people have no fear of asylum in the country from which they came but have engaged in activities here in order to construct such a fear because they wished to stay longer than their visitors' entry visas allowed. However, the measure will not be used to send people back to a country in which they have a well-founded fear of persecution.

Although the Bill is designed to make our procedures more efficient, it is predicated on the basis that someone who arrives here with a well-founded fear of persecution in the place from which he has come will find a safe haven. That is the intention of the Bill and that is why I am happy to introduce amendment No. 25, although, strictly speaking, it is unnecessary. However, it is a reassurance and a signal. If, by any chance, any Government should produce rules in conflict with the United Nations convention, they would have to amend this primary legislation before they could avoid a court striking it down.

Question put and negatived.

New Clause 4

PROCEDURE ON RULES RELATING TO ASYLUM

'. The following paragraph is inserted after the second paragraph of section 3(2) of the Immigration Act 1971—

"No rule relating to asylum, or change in such a rule, shall have effect until the statement of that rule, or change in a rule, has been approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament.".'.—*[Mr. Darling.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Darling: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 22, at end add—

'(3) The Secretary of State shall from time to time lay before Parliament statements of the rules, or of any changes in the rules, laid down by him as to the practice to be followed in the administration of this Act, such rules to be known as the Immigration (Asylum) Rules, and the Secretary of State shall consult with, and have regard to the views of, the representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in drawing up such rules.'.

Mr. Darling: Perhaps I may make two preliminary points. The new clause, together with amendment No. 1, bears upon the rules. Perhaps the Bill is unusual in that it depends on the Lord Chancellor's rules of procedure and the immigration rules to make it work. It was not surprising, therefore, that in Committee there was much discussion about the rules, as a result of which changes have been made.

My first preliminary point is that it is extremely unfortunate that the revised rules—there are substantial revisions both in the procedure rules and in the immigration rules—were made available to members of the Committee only at 1 o'clock this afternoon. It follows, therefore, that my remarks may stand to be corrected, as I may have missed some points that I did not see in the comparison that I was able to make between the old rules and the new rules between 1 o'clock and 3.30 this afternoon. That is unfortunate. There is a duty on hon. Members to scrutinise legislation before it is passed into law. Fortunately, there is an opportunity in another place further to examine the rules as they bear upon the Bill.

My second preliminary point—the Minister might be more cheered by it—is that substantial concessions have been made by the Government. I regard that as a tribute not only to the argument that took place in Committee but to the substantive pressure that was brought to bear on the Government by the many agencies, organisations and individuals outside the House who were concerned at the Government's original proposals. Some of them, including the author of the article to which the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) referred, played their part in making the Government think again.

I do not believe in unnecessarily using words such as "climbdown", "U-turn" and so on—I would not go that far. However, it is fair to say that the Government have brought forward the Bill in a hasty manner. Our debate about legal aid demonstrated that the Home Secretary and the Government had not fully thought out the implications contained in the Home Secretary's statement on 2 July last year, let alone in the Bill itself. It is noticeable that the trumpeting that took place last summer and last autumn, particularly at the Tory party conference, has not been repeated today because the Government know that they have had to change their mind on a number of significant

[Mr. Darling]

points. We shall still seek to divide the House because, despite the many concessions that the Government have made, the Bill remains flawed in one or two essential respects.

I shall deal briefly with the various papers that the Minister has been good enough to make available to members of the Committee. I assume that they are available to other hon. Members as well. I refer first to the Lord Chancellor's draft rules relating to procedure. The first concession that the Government have made—it is extremely welcome and it attracted much comment—was that applicants seeking leave to appeal now have 10 days to do so rather than the ridiculously short period of two days provided in the original rules. Paragraph 29 of the new draft provides that time limits in general may be waived, I think, on cause shown. That is an extremely welcome concession. It will undoubtedly remove some of the injustices that we feared would occur with individuals having only two days in which to lodge their appeals.

6.45 pm

Equally, I very much welcome the Government's change of heart with regard to oral hearings, up to a point. It is now provided quite clearly in paragraph 9 that hearings will be determined orally in two quite specific circumstances. However, there is still no right of appeal for applicants as such. There is only an entitlement to apply for leave to appeal. When leave to appeal is granted, an oral hearing follows, but there is no right to an oral hearing when arguing the point of leave to appeal. The two things are, of course, quite different.

I am pleased that the original paragraph 5(7) in the original rules, which required that the special adjudicator should grant the applicant leave to appeal unless he was satisfied that the applicant did not have an arguable claim for asylum, appears—at least from my preliminary reading at lunchtime time today—to have been dropped. I make that point because we argued strongly in Committee that, when considering whether an applicant has an arguable claim, it would be necessary to assess matters of credibility. Therefore, the Minister's point in response to the hon. and learned Member for Burton was crucial when considering the terms of paragraph 5(7) of the old rules.

However, it would appear that in the new rules paragraph 5(7) is not replicated in its original form. If that means that there is a different onus on the special adjudicator, it is to be welcomed. As I have said, that point will require further consideration—I hope that it will be in another place—because I have not had an opportunity to consider whether in the fine print of the rules there is some further qualification.

The amendments to the Lord Chancellor's procedure rules are welcome. I am sure that those who have brought pressure to bear on the Government will be pleased that some changes have been made.

On the draft immigration rules and the revision that was published today, again substantial concessions have been made, although questions remain. When considering credibility, the first thing that has to be said is that, in the original rules, the Home Office had to consider a number of factors such as the failure of an applicant to apply for asylum immediately on his arrival in the United Kingdom, whether false representations were made, and whether—it is an important point—documents were destroyed, damaged or disposed of. We cited the example of the Kurd fleeing Iraq, who would not have arrived in this country with proper travel documents because he would never have got out of Iraq if he had had such documents. I am pleased that the Government have now included an important caveat, which is that, if no reasonable explanation is adduced, such matters may affect an applicant's credibility; in other words, it appears that the applicant for asylum has an opportunity to explain why no immediate claim was made or why the documents were destroyed or damaged. That concession is important.

It is important to note that the interpretation of the rules will be crucial. Although the Minister has published a guide to the Home Office procedure—I am bound to say that it is more like a tourist guide to the Home Office rather than a detailed examination of the standing orders—I hope that, once he has a final draft or the actual standing orders given to those who interpret the rules, he will make them available. Although the changes that the Government have made are very welcome, or at least appear to be so, the interpretation will be crucial.

The point is important when one examines the new paragraph 6(d) which deals with those applicants for asylum who undertake any activities in this country which might be calculated to enhance a claim for asylum. The Minister and the Home Secretary graphically painted a picture of someone who had never any intention of applying for asylum but who, deciding that this was the best avenue for extending leave to stay in the country, would appear in front of the television camera, denounce the Government of the country from where he came and then seek asylum.

The Government have now changed the paragraph to qualify it to the extent that the behaviour must be inconsistent with previous beliefs and behaviour. That is welcome, but I should like the Minister to tell us how we judge whether it is inconsistent. It is clearly a matter of judgment. Any of us who have even a modicum of experience of these matters will know that much depends on the individual officer in deciding whether such and such an expression might be consistent with beliefs.

For example, I might hold very strong beliefs about something but might never say anything about it. Then one day I am moved for one reason or another to make a public utterance. Someone judging me could say that I had never said anything in the past about these things, whereas I could have said things privately or things that had never come to public notice. It would, therefore, be helpful if the Minister could let us know what guidelines for interpretation are to be applied to the provisions of that subclause.

Equally, I am pleased that the blanket statement that the actions of anyone who appeared to act on behalf of an applicant could be held against the applicant has now been removed, and it is clearly stated that it has to be the actions of anyone acting as an agent. However, one or two problems remain, one of which I would like to deal with.

I am not certain whether the influx of Albanian refugees or those who purported to seek asylum in Italy is likely to be replicated in the United Kingdom because of our geographical position, but the same thing may happen on a small scale: we have had experience of groups of 10, 20 or 30 applying. I am concerned that paragraph 9 of the revised rules still seems to provide that an assessment can be made of one individual and the outcome of that assessment will determine the applications of the rest of the

group. That does not seem to me to be desirable, but, rather, fraught with dangers. It is one of the flaws that the Government must tackle. Presumably these draft rules will have to be further revised because they must be approved by the House, but I should like the Government to think about that.

Similarly, on the question of the third-country cases, the Government have made an improvement in the original provision, but there is still this concern about the interpretation of a safe third country.

I have not dealt exhaustively with these rules because it is impossible to do so on Report, but I thought it right to highlight some of the problems which I expect and hope will be addressed in another place.

The Minister has also been good enough to have published the proposed procedure for dealing with asylum applications. The more I read it, the more it appeared not to be guidelines that would be issued to the immigration officers and the Home Office staff who will deal with these things but more the sort of glossy publication that one might find as a guide to the Home Office and how it works. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) asked for this to be made available and he may have something more to say about it.

One thing struck me in paragraph 9 which has some bearing on a later group of amendments dealing with housing: it still makes the point that there may be some delay before asylum applications reach the asylum division and are recorded, and that has some bearing on whether an individual ought to be housed under clause 3 of the Bill. Perhaps the Minister will take the opportunity to talk about delays which are, in some people's view, endemic in the Home Office and which, when they affect an individual, are a serious matter.

Something also ought to be said—because it has a direct bearing on the terms of this amendment—on the political asylum questionnaire that the Minister has made available. I had the opportunity of looking at one of these, perhaps in a slightly different form, when I visited terminal 3 at Heathrow a couple of years ago. My only concern is that the questions are fairly general. When I watched an officer going through an applicant's form with him, he stuck rather rigidly to the questions; where one answer came up that did not quite fit in with the question, the officer said,

"Well, the question does not say that so we'll just put 'Yes'."

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will appreciate that the immigration officer is filling in a preliminary questionnaire to get some basic facts down, not as a member of the asylum division staff who is assessing a case. I just want to make sure that the hon. Member is distinguishing who he is talking about, because the immigration officer has a limited task which is to get some basic facts down.

Mr. Darling: I apologise. I was using the general term. I was surrounded by immigration officers that day. He was, as I understand it, a member of the asylum division. If the Minister doubts it, I am afraid that I did not ask him to identify himself with name, rank and number, but I was led to believe that that is what he was. I confess that my attention was more taken up with the form itself and with the exchange of questioning between the "officer", if I might call him that, the interpreter and the person seeking asylum.

The central thrust of our complaint about the immigration rules—I suppose that it goes to the heart of one of our objections to the Bill—is that, contrary to what was said in the press release when the Bill was introduced, there is no right of appeal; in fact, the right of appeal has been taken away from in-country people. The only thing that remains is the right to seek leave to appeal; that remains in the rules, as I understand it. There is no oral hearing to be allowed, which is something that we argued for when arguing for leave to appeal.

For that reason we believe that the rules are fundamentally flawed, but, as I indicated at the start, and having entered the caveat that I must enter in case I am faulted later—that the opportunity to look at these rules was substantially less than we should have liked—it appears that the Government have accepted many of the criticisms that were levelled at them, and even if I had any doubt about that from my reading of the rules I think that my assertion would be greatly supported by the fact that the Home Secretary is not proposing to speak on the Bill. That speaks eloquently of the extent to which the Government have changed their minds since the Bill was introduced last year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am sorry that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and the House did not have the revised draft rules earlier. I produced the original draft rules in time for First Reading. They have been revised extensively in the light of what was said in Committee and other comments upon them and because of our own desire at the Home Office to make them clearer. This is a further draft, and I have no doubt that there may be further changes after discussions in another place and that we shall not get to a final draft until the rules are laid before the House in the normal way, when there will be the opportunity for the House to take a decision on them.

I am almost reluctant to mention new clause 4 because the hon. Gentleman said little about it. However, it would require a change to the rules relating to asylum to be approved by both Houses before those provisions could come into effect.

It would be unthinkable for the House not to have sufficient opportunity to debate and, if it so decides, to reject any changes in the asylum rules. That is why the Immigration Act 1971 requires the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a statement of any changes in the immigration rules, leaving the House 40 days in which to debate them and, if it so desires, to reject them. If the House rejects the changes, the Secretary of State must lay before the House a statement making further changes. That provides an opportunity for the parliamentary scrutiny of changes to the rules while always allowing changes to be made quickly, where necessary. I shall make only the basic observation that since September 1990 there have been nine different changes in the immigration rules, but the Opposition have asked for debates on none of them.

7 pm

Mr. Darling: To be fair, and for the benefit of those who follow the proceedings in this place, may I point out that many changes to the immigration rules are minor and uncontroversial? I am sure that the Minister will recognise that it is only when matters of substance need to be debated that we request and get debates. Changes to the

[Mr. Darling]

immigration rules may involve adding or deleting a country from a list, which is not always a worthy reason for detaining the House for an evening's debate.

Mr. Lloyd: That is perfectly right and that is what I would have gone on to say, but the hon. Gentleman has put it very well. I wish, however, that he would talk more about his new clause, which requires that there should be such a debate before any changes could be effected. The Opposition were, of course, right not to press for debates on minor matters, but they are introducing provisions that require a debate before any changes can be effective. They have the opportunity to ensure that there is a debate within 40 days of the introduction of any such changes.

I turn now to the hon. Gentleman's questions about the further revisions to the rules of procedure and to the immigration rules themselves. I am glad that he is pleased with the changes. I do not want to undermine his satisfaction and, because he was generous to me, I shall not argue with him much about the fact that fundamental changes have been pressed upon us and that he does not intend to press us as far as his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) by suggesting that there has been a climbdown. When he reads the rules, he will see that, in principle, they remain as they were before, except in areas on which we specifically consulted.

I refer to the length of time that somebody has to ask for leave to appeal. That was always a matter for consultation and we have changed the provisions to the 10 working days' requirement. That is the general requirement in the tribunal and special appellate system. The Home Office has sought to explain more clearly in words the original intention that was incorporated in the rules —to explain them more fully in cases where there has been misunderstanding, and generally to make the provisions clearer. In that sense, our discussions in Committee and the comments that have been made by those outside the House, especially the UNHCR, have been helpful.

As a number of areas on which I could comment are covered by later amendments, it would not be sensible for me to take up the time of the House with them now——

Mr. Corbyn: The Minister has sent those hon. Members who served on the Standing Committee a consultation draft of the statutory instrument and the immigration rule changes. Although they require some study and application, we have now had them for only a couple of hours. Exactly what procedure does the Minister propose to adopt on the method of consultation? As far as I am aware, consultation has not taken this form previously for Members of Parliament. Is the Minister inviting representations from us now, or is he proposing that, following the representations, there may be a debate on a prayer not to agree the statutory instrument?

Mr. Lloyd: I am publishing them in draft to invite representations and comments from the House either now during the debate or from hon. Members after the debate or from organisations outside the House in an attempt to allow informed discussion in another place. We shall then produce another set of rules—possibly exactly the same, but perhaps containing further changes—that will then come before both Houses in the normal way for their approval. There is time for further representation——

Mr. Corbyn: How much time?

Mr. Lloyd: Not until the legislation is on the statute book, but not very much later than that date, which I hope will be within a limited period. This is not the end of the representation period. If the hon. Gentleman would like to consider the provisions further, he can then let me know his views. He does not need to feel that he has lost his chance or that he need detain the House this evening while he reads through them and cogitates.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central referred to the "arguable claim" and to the fact that the adjudicator would judge, on the papers, whether there was an arguable claim. The hon. Gentleman was pleased that those provisions are not in the latest draft of the procedural rules. However, the paper that is attached to the procedural rules may have come adrift on his copy. That paper suggests that, as I said in Committee, I want to see that description reworded and included in the primary legislation because I believe—*[Interruption.]* I shall show the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central. It is here. So that there can be no misunderstanding, I advise the House that the phrase "arguable claim" has come out of the rules so that it can be included in the primary legislation in a different form.

I regret that I have been unable to produce that amendment for debate this evening, but we look forward to introducing it in another place. We shall seek to make it clear that, if the adjudicator believed every word of the case that was put to him by the appellant, he would have to acknowledge that that would be a claim that was at least arguable under the United Nations convention. The adjudicator makes his decision, not on the credibility of the applicant, but on the claim that the applicant has made to him. The adjudicator will say to himself, "Although I may not believe that this looks true and the Home Office is right to disbelieve it, if it looks true, that claim would be arguable under the United Nations convention, so I must have a full oral hearing."

That is how we filter out those manifestly unfounded claims in which there is no disagreement about the fact that the individual has come from a third safe country where his claim would be properly heard, or, as was mentioned on Second Reading and in Committee, those cases where by no stretch of the imagination could the United Nations convention cover that claim. I refer, for example, to the case of the woman who sought asylum because she said that her mother-in-law was interfering in her marriage so much that the marriage would break up if she and her husband were not allowed to come here to live. We are talking about a low threshold, but one which the Government believe necessary to filter out the manifestly unfounded claims. In fact, that threshold is much lower than the one that was produced by the Bar Council in the rather eccentric evidence and suggestions that it has sent to me.

Mr. Darling: Perhaps the Minister could tell us from where this information comes. He says that it is from a piece of paper that may have become detached from the papers that he sent us at lunchtime. The issue of what the special adjudicator has to decide is crucial. If the Minister is saying that that information is not in the rules, the draft rules or the Bill, but is on a detached piece of paper, he

appears to be falling short of the standards that we normally expect from the Government. On what detached piece of paper is that information?

Mr. Lloyd: I am giving the hon. Gentleman the piece of paper that I have detached, and he may read it. The hon. Gentleman should worry less than he does because the amendment that will be produced from that is not before us today. It will, I am afraid, have to be introduced in another place, but I did not want the hon. Gentleman to think that "arguable case" had simply been dropped from the rules. The Government propose to do what I presaged in Committee, which is to introduce an amendment into the primary legislation that will make it quite clear how low the threshold must be before the adjudicator can refuse the claim to appeal.

The hon. Gentleman raised several other points. On the question of credibility, he referred in particular to paragraph 6(d):

"that the applicant has undertaken any activities in the United Kingdom before or after lodging his application which are inconsistent with his previous beliefs and behaviour and calculated to create or substantially enhance his claim for refugee status."

That, of course, is the kind of question—and there are many of them—that the asylum division has to answer in each case. It has to look at the totality of the claim, what the individual says, and all the available evidence so that it can make a fair decision that takes everything into account.

The rules indicate that these are matters which affect credibility, have always affected credibility and must always affect credibility—not necessarily deleteriously, because if there is a good answer it will explain the point. These matters are inevitably taken into account where the totality of a claim is being considered. It is only fair and honest that this be put down in writing and indicated clearly, and that it should continue to be the case, since some interested individuals, such as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central, do not quite realise that this is the case. We shall be coming later to a number of these points.

I cannot support the proposals tabled by the hon. Member and his hon. Friends. He did not give them much support himself. On the rules, I am glad that he is pleased with the changes that have been made. I hope that on further study, when he has had longer to look at them, he will be even more pleased. This is a second draft and we are still open to suggestions and criticisms. My aim is to ensure that the Government's original intentions come over clearly. I believe that the changes that we have made have helped and that the Opposition, although not assenting to them all, have found them more satisfactory. For that I am grateful.

Mr. Darling: I will not argue with the Minister's explanations. It really does not matter why the rules have been changed. I believe that, after further examination, further improvements will be suggested. Many of the changes are welcome, but there is much further to go. Incidentally, I said that I would not use the term "climbdown" with regard to the rules but I would not depart for one minute from what my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said about the Government's change of heart on the legal aid, advice and assistance scheme. That is most certainly a climbdown.

On the question of what constitutes an arguable claim, it is regrettable that the Government's proposals are not contained in the Bill, the draft rules or even the second draft; they are contained in what appears to be a press notice indicating that the Government intend to change their mind on the question. That is extremely unfortunate. It is the sort of behaviour that has dogged this Bill since its heralding in July last year. It appears that the Government have it in mind to make further amendments, some of them substantial. I am glad of that. The longer the Government continue to amend the Bill, the better are the chances that some of the risks that were quite rightly highlighted during the passage of the Bill will be lessened.

We remain dissatisfied with the rules, particularly on the question of leave to appeal, and for that reason we will press the new clause to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 287.

Division No. 46] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H')*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy

Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Thomas McAvoy and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Keliett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth

Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 7

THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD

'No statutory instrument giving effect to or supplementing any of the provisions of this Act shall contain any provision depriving a person of a right to be heard before a special adjudicator or the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.'.—*[Mr. Fraser.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Fraser: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 4, in clause 5, page 5, line 39, at end add—

'(8) Rule 14 of the Immigration Appeals (Procedure) Rules 1984 shall have effect in respect of appeals from the special adjudicator to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.'.

No. 5, in clause 6, page 5, line 48, after 'law', insert 'or fact'.

No. 6, in page, 6, line 12, at end add—

'(5) For the purposes of this section the words "question of law" include the question as to whether an asylum seeker has had the opportunity to be heard and to be represented before a special adjudicator or the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.'.

No. 9, in schedule 2, page 10, line 31, at end insert

'except on a question of law in those cases where the parties to the application for leave have been heard and have appeared before the special adjudicator, but otherwise a refusal shall attract a right of appeal.'.

No. 10, in page 11, line 14, at end insert

'and an application for leave to appeal to the Tribunal shall be on any question of law or fact material to that determination.'.

Mr. Fraser: New clause 7 would prevent the Home Secretary or the Lord Chancellor from making any immigration appeal rules that would deprive an applicant on an appeal, or seeking leave to appeal, of a hearing before the special adjudicator or the immigration appeal tribunal. It is a matter to which we referred in our previous debate and about which we argued at great length in Committee. We return, however, to our belief that those who have a case to be heard have the right to have their case put to an adjudicator personally, to be heard personally before him, rather than the application being submitted in writing for leave to appeal.

Amendment No. 4 would incorporate in the new draft rules, which the Government have published today, rule 14 of the immigration appeal rules of 1984. Rule 14 of the set of rules that apply to existing appeals gives a person whose appeal has been turned down by an adjudicator the right to obtain leave to appeal to the immigration appeal tribunal on a point of law—that is the first limb—and provides an exception that takes effect in those cases where it is argued by the appellant that to refuse leave to remain would put the Government in breach of the convention on refugees. In that second, limited area, there is a right of appeal to the immigration appeal tribunal.

7.30 pm

By means of amendment No. 4, we propose to preserve the special right that has been incorporated in the appeal rules ever since they were first enunciated. I think that the Minister would agree that the 1984 rules are a rehash of earlier rules. It is important to draw attention to rule 14 because unless its effect is preserved the new rules will represent a significant subtraction from the rights of claimants for political asylum who are in the United Kingdom.

Amendment No. 5 is an alternative to the new clause. When someone had not been able to exercise the right to be heard before a special adjudicator, the breach of that fundamental right would in itself amount to a ground for appeal on a point of law to the adjudicator and thence to the immigration appeal tribunal.

Amendment No. 6 is an alternative to amendment No. 5. Perhaps it goes further, because it would widen appeal rights to include an appeal on a point of fact. If the Minister does not concede the new clause and amendment No. 5, amendment No. 6 would introduce a right of appeal on a point of fact and everyone would be able to exercise that right of appeal.

Amendment No. 9 replicates amendment No. 5 in its application to the immigration appeal tribunal. Amendment No. 10 replicates amendment No. 6, again in respect of the immigration appeal tribunal. At the heart of the new clause and the amendments is the right to be heard, which is fundamental to the exercise of an appellant's rights before any judicial or quasi-judicial body.

The Minister may be going about the matter in the wrong way and thereby making a rod for his own back. He said earlier that to obtain leave to appeal it is necessary only to write out a claim, and if every word of it is true that must constitute a ground for giving leave to appeal to the special adjudicator.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: That is only if everything in the claim is true and it provides grounds that are arguable under the United Nations convention. Only then will the adjudicator be obliged to allow an oral appeal.

Mr. Fraser: That is what I meant. As the right to be heard is being removed, something of a premium is being put on a case that will not be made under oath and in such terms that it will be difficult for the special adjudicator to resist giving leave to appeal. That is why I said that the Minister may be making a rod for his own back.

The proper solution might be to adopt the procedure of the High Court in cases of judicial review. In such cases —this is not exclusively so—the applicant makes an application in writing to be considered by the judge. In many cases, the judge will give leave for judicial review —in other words, leave to appeal against a decision refusing the status of political asylum. In those cases where the judge does not give leave on the written application, there is automatically the right to renew the application and to make an oral application to the divisional court and to be heard. It is the right to be heard at one point or another in the process which is at the heart of the new clause and the amendments.

In the long run, it would satisfy the basic tenets of justice if our amendments were accepted. Ironically enough, they might provide greater satisfaction for the Minister. Perhaps we can reach agreement and the Minister will be able to say that, on consideration, he will ensure that the Bill, if not amended in the terms that I put forward but by means of similar drafting, will eventually establish the fundamental right to be heard that should appear in this legislation.

Mr. Corbyn: I support new clause 7 and the amendments that are grouped with it. I do so with no great joy because they take up one of the issues that we debated at great length in Committee. We were concerned about the lack of proper rights to appeal for those seeking political asylum or any other sort of asylum, social, religious or whatever. I moved an amendment in Committee, with the support of others, which would have prevented the Home Secretary having the right to remove anyone from this country until all the legal avenues open to him or her had been exhausted, including the European Court of Human Rights. It seems that we are in the unfortunate position where the hated Immigration Act 1971, which established the immigration appeal tribunal system, is the only legislation on which we can fall back to provide some avenue for appeal that is slightly better than that of an adjudicator.

I do not believe that the Government have acted in any great belief in the right of appeal. Instead, I believe that they are under pressure from the courts—court administrators and, no doubt, groups of High Court judges who get together for port at the end of their dinners to chat about these matters—which are concerned about the many judicial reviews that have been sought and the hearings that have been granted.

It is a condemnation of the United Kingdom's ability to allow those seeking asylum a proper avenue of legal appeal if the only route open to them is for their solicitor to ensure that an application for judicial review is heard. The system of judicial review was not set up for that. It is a long stop that has become the norm because there is nothing else open to applicants and those who represent them. We are saying that those who are denied the right of asylum should at least have the opportunity to appear before the immigration trial tribunal. That is because it is better than no form of appeal and not because I think that it is an especially good system. It is not acceptable to have asylum applications dealt with in the present manner and in the way in which the Bill envisages.

Any form of justice should include the presumption of innocence and a separation of legal and judicial powers. My experience of immigration law and asylum law is that there is no presumption of innocence, especially in immigration law. There is no presumption at any stage in favour of the person who is seeking asylum in this country. There is a presumption against them that is contrary to the principles of English law. It leaves enormous powers in the hands of the Home Secretary, who has been ready to use them. One thinks of the poor teacher from Zaire who was disgracefully bundled out of this country, apparently lost in Charles de Gaulle airport, and was finally dumped back in Zaire—from which he had fled in great fear. All that was because the Home Secretary was not prepared to take action. One thinks also of the Tamils who were wrongfully deported to Sri Lanka. There were other instances in which the actions of the Home Office and of the Home Secretary in particular were found seriously wanting. The amendments will not right all those wrongs, but they provide an opportunity for the due process of law and for an appeal.

The alternative suggested by the Home Office is a series of adjudicators. I do not doubt that many of them will be well informed and well trained. However, the most well-informed and well-trained people are capable of making mistakes. The point at issue is how one can introduce checks and balances into a legal system that allows mistakes to be made without offering any chance of rectifying them. The Government's proposals provide no such opportunity, and the amendments will make a slight improvement to what is really a pretty squalid little Bill.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): I am prompted to speak against new clause 7 by the remarks of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). There is of course in the Bill a presumption against applicants for asylum. Everyone would concede that. The reason is that a large number of the people who make applications have already destroyed their identity documents.

As to the immigration appeal tribunal, the Bill has been brought before the House because that tribunal is swamped and is in administrative difficulties.

Mr. Corbyn: The hon. Gentleman should be more cautious before stating that

"a large number of the people who make applications have already destroyed their identity documents."

Does he have any proof? That is not the case, and the hon. Gentleman should check the figures. Has he read all the applications that are claimed to be bogus, or does the hon. Gentleman rely—like the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit)—on the front page of the *News of the World* for his information?

Mr. Allason: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to clarify that point. My understanding is that two thirds of those people arriving in the United Kingdom claiming asylum do so with forged, mutilated or no documents. It is in those circumstances that the Government have brought the Bill before the House,

which seems perfectly reasonable. The old system clearly cannot cope with the level of applicants, and to return to it would be absolutely dotty.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) rightly said that the central issue is the right of leave to appeal. That is why I registered surprise when we appeared to reach that aspect when debating the previous group of amendments. The amendments now before us deal primarily with the Bill's requirement that where an applicant's claim is rejected by the Home Office, and before he can make a full oral appeal, he must obtain leave from the adjudicator, who will decide from the papers whether to grant it.

In Committee, and when debating the previous group of amendments, I made it clear that the rule is necessary to avoid manifestly unfounded and third safe country claims introducing unnecessary delays into the system. In third country cases, speed is of the essence if we are to be sure that the third safe country will receive the applicant and consider his or her claim fully.

Mr. Corbyn: The third country aspect is referred to in more measured tones in the draft rules that the Minister published today. In Committee, I expressed concern that third countries might on the face of it appear safe, yet the reality of someone from parts of north Africa living in Paris or another major French city, given the degree of racist violence that is to be found there, might make France, for example, far from safe. Does the Minister concede that an apparently safe third country may not prove to be so for some individuals?

7.45 pm

Mr. Lloyd: My prime consideration is whether an asylum claim will be properly heard under the terms of the UN convention. Some claims will be properly heard in a third country, but that may not be so in respect of some individuals from a particular country. We would not seek to return a person if we were not satisfied that a country had a proper system for considering asylum cases and that it would assess thoroughly the claim of the individual in question. We always refer third country cases to UKIAS, as the point of contact with the UNHCR in respect of such matters.

I cannot tell the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) that reports of violence or discriminatory behaviour in a particular country would of themselves serve as a ground for never returning someone there as a third safe country. However, the totality of a person's claim, even in respect of a third safe country, is taken into account—and there is the right to seek leave to appeal before the adjudicator. If the adjudicator considers that there is an arguable reason for an individual believing that he or she would not receive reasonable treatment of the kind required under the United Nations convention in the third safe country, he would allow an appeal to be heard. That matter is for the adjudicator.

The original draft procedural rules made it clear that an adjudicator had to attend a full hearing unless he was satisfied that the applicant did not have an arguable case —that, even if all the applicant said was true, it still did not add up to a claim that could be argued even under the provisions of the 1951 convention. From the remarks of the hon. Member for Norwood, it was clear that it was dawning on him how low was the threshold in practice. Therefore, I do not accept that the Opposition's fears are justified.

If there is a soupcon of doubt in the adjudicator's mind that there is the beginning of a case that can be argued, he must go to an oral hearing. If a decision of the Home Office hinged on the applicant's credibility, the adjudicator would be compelled to permit an oral hearing. He could not say to himself, "I am not surprised that the Home Office turned down that individual, because I cannot imagine anyone believing his story." He could not refuse an oral hearing on that basis, but must allow one on the basis of the credibility of the individual and the tale that he told.

The adjudicator can refuse an oral hearing only if he is certain that, even if the applicant's story is true, it does not bring that individual into the ambit of the 1951 convention. In Committee, I undertook to consider whether that should not only be spelt out more fully in the procedural rules but—as it is crucial—be written into the primary legislation. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that it should. I am sorry that the wording is not ready for this stage, but it is the Government's intention to table an appropriate amendment in another place.

I hope that that will satisfy Opposition Members to some extent, especially as there is likely to be a further debate about the issue in the House of Commons. I feel that a filter should be available for claims that have no merit. I do not believe that we should allow appeal against a refusal of leave, given that such refusals will be issued only when there is no arguable case under the convention. If it were impossible to refuse a hearing on the papers, one of the Bill's purposes—its provision for manifestly unfounded applications to be dealt with speedily—would be undermined.

If, however, an adjudicator ignored the criteria that I have described—whose liberality has been recognised by the hon. Member for Norwood—and refused an oral hearing although an arguable case existed, that would be exactly the kind of circumstance on which judicial review would properly bite. I do not believe that it will come to that; but the provision is there lest an adjudicator interpret the requirements too narrowly.

Several amendments seek to ensure that appeals from the adjudicator to the tribunal are not confined to matters of law. I agree with that, but I do not think that such a provision should be contained in the legislation. The normal place for such measures is in the procedural rules, and the draft rules now include an amendment that widens the grounds to matters of fact. I do not believe, however, that the grounds for appeal to the High Court should be similarly widened; I think it right that appeals from the tribunal should still be confined to matters of law.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): Have I understood my hon. Friend correctly? Is he saying that the provision previously contained in rule 5(7), which referred to those with no arguable claim for asylum, will now be contained in the body of the Act?

Mr. Lloyd: That is the Government's intention. I hoped that we would be able to discuss that provision tonight, but it will now be discussed in the other place; if it is accepted there, it will return to the House of Commons later.

[Mr. Lloyd]

The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) suggested that the appeal rights had been brought under pressure by the requirements of the courts and the Government's desire for less judicial review. Certainly I hope that there will be less judicial review, but one of the main reasons for our proposals is the demonstrable unfairness of circumstances in which only some asylum seekers have the opportunity to appeal to an independent authority. Surely they should all have the same rights. Given our wish for a speedier process, the safeguard of an independent appeal system for everyone is especially important.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Mr. Allason) is right: numbers have risen sharply. It is because of that increase that some of the measures in the Bill have been included. However, in so far as the burden of proof mentioned by the hon. Member for Islington, North exists, it was not caused by the greater numbers. When someone arrives and asks for asylum, it is natural to say, "Tell me about your experiences; I must be satisfied that you are indeed seeking asylum." That will inevitably place some burden on the asylum seeker, but one reason for the section of the rules that deals with credibility—although it may not govern the eventual decision—is that it is fair to expect someone with a well-founded claim to wish to co-operate with the authorities, and to reveal as much as he can about himself, his origins and his case. It is up to him, in the first place, to explain why he is seeking asylum.

Mr. Allason: My hon. Friend has mentioned the number of asylum seekers who arrive with mutilated identity papers, or whose papers have been destroyed. What is the proportion?

Mr. Lloyd: About two thirds of those who seek asylum at the ports, who themselves constitute about a quarter, or perhaps a third, of asylum seekers. The figure currently runs at 10,000 to 12,000 a year. Naturally, we ask why the people concerned have no papers, or why their papers have been mutilated, and in many cases they give convincing answers: indeed, their explanations may well enhance their credibility. It is reasonable, however, for us to make inquiries, to take the answers into account and to spell out the requirements in the rules, as we have always done.

Mr. Corbyn: The Immigration (Carrier's Liability) Act 1987 recognises that some people fleeing persecution are forced to destroy their real identity and to seek a false identity. Will the Minister confirm that the Home Office does not intend to depart from the recognition that people who are fleeing for their safety may have no alternative but to destroy their identity, and travel with forged documents?

Mr. Lloyd: I accept what the hon. Gentleman has said. No one who has arrived with mutilated documents, or without documents, will ever be refused asylum in this country. As I have said, however, such people will be asked for an explanation. The answer may well affect their credibility: it may enhance that credibility, but it will often do the opposite.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): One of the main reasons for the Bill is the massive increase over the past two or three years in the number of people either seeking entry on the basis of being asylum seekers, or entering with a visitor's or student's visa and, after six or nine months, deciding—lo and behold!—that they are really political refugees.

As the Bill acknowledges, it is essential to provide guaranteed safeguards to ensure that the applications of genuine political refugees are examined properly and—if proved to be genuine—dealt with accordingly. It is equally essential to provide a fast-track procedure to identify and weed out the vast majority of the people who constitute that increase in numbers—those who could not be thought other than thoroughly bogus except by fatuous do-gooders. Such people do a great disservice to genuine applicants for political refugee status.

Mr. Boateng: The genuine tone and flavour of the hon. Gentleman's remarks are as we would expect, given his pedigree in this regard. It is not clear, however, to which amendment he is directing them.

Mr. Janman: I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman say that. I was in the middle of saying that it is important to establish procedures that will provide safeguards for genuine applications.

Mr. Boateng: To which amendment does the hon. Gentleman refer?

8 pm

Mr. Janman: I am speaking to all the amendments that the House is currently considering. The hon. Gentleman will soon learn that my comments are about the collective impact of the amendments that the Labour party has tabled. I do not wish to get bogged down in the technical legalities of any particular amendment. The point that I was seeking to make when I gave way to the hon. Gentleman was that it is important that a mechanism should be put in place that ensures that the vast majority of applications that are clearly bogus can be weeded out effectively, efficiently and quickly. If that is not done, genuine applicants will have to wait much longer, and will be caught up in a massive queue.

The Labour party is being as deceitful as ever. A general election is looming. The vast majority of ordinary working men and women, whom the Labour party purports to represent, are in favour of the provisions of the Bill and the new immigration rules that will also come into force. However, rather than just stand up and say, "We oppose the Bill because we want the outrageous things that have been going on during the last two or three years to continue," the Labour party has tabled amendments that look very nice on paper but whose effect, if they were accepted by the Government, would be to drive a coach and horses through the required changes that the Bill will bring about.

If the amendments were accepted, we would end up maintaining a long-drawn-out appeals procedure for all these bogus applicants. They would be able to keep on appealing and we would be unable, therefore, to weed out quickly any bogus applications. We would therefore be unable to reduce the massive backlog of genuine applications.

We know what these people do while their cases go on and on. Either they disappear into the inner depths of Birmingham or Bradford or wherever, or they meet and marry a British citizen, thereby bringing a new arrow into their armoury when it comes to arguing their case for being

allowed to remain in Britain, having entered this country in the first place by means of deceit and lies when they reached the port of entry.

I am sure that the Minister agrees with me that the amendments should be resisted and treated with the contempt they deserve. They would undo the objective of the Bill, which is to deal with a very serious problem about which many of my constituents and, I am sure, people in general are becoming increasingly concerned. They expect the Government to plug the gap. I am pleased to see that they are plugging it. I note that, once again, the Labour party is trying to prevent measures being taken to sort out a problem that worries millions of people in this country.

Mr. Fraser: I shall not respond to what the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) has just said, except in one respect. He said that he wanted a fast track procedure to get rid of undesirable people. That fast track procedure is on its way in Thurrock. It is called the general election.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. When I hold my seat at the next election, I am sure that his party will have to choose a new candidate for the following election.

Mr. Fraser: I was referring not to the hon. Gentleman's opponent but to him.

I have an unpleasant surprise for the hon. Gentleman. He urged the Minister to resist the amendments. I intend to ask the leave of the House to withdraw them. The Minister has practically met the point that we made by means of two very important concessions. He intends to table an amendment in another place to deal with the matters that he outlined in his speech. If the amendment has the effect that the Minister said it would have, it will go a very long way towards meeting our point. It will ensure that, in practice, virtually every applicant for political asylum will be given an oral hearing. That is what we want. That is what I believe the Under-Secretary of State will give us. We shall have the opportunity to examine the matter again when the Bill returns here. We have almost got together on this issue.

In addition, there are the substantial changes that were set out by the Under-Secretary of State. They are described in the draft rules governing appeals to the immigration appeal tribunal.

I am grateful, for the time being, for the concessions that have been promised by the Under-Secretary of State. I am sorry to have disappointed the hon. Member for Thurrock.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1

THE CONVENTION, CLAIMS FOR ASYLUM AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Amendment made: No. 25, in page 1, line 14, at end insert—

'(1A) Nothing in the immigration rules (within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971) shall lay down any practice which would be contrary to the Convention.'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I beg to move amendment No. 26, in page 1, line 15, leave out subsection (2).

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to consider Government amendments Nos. 27 and 28.

Mr. Lloyd: Some concern was expressed in Committee about the definition of an asylum seeker being linked to the recording of a claim. There was considerable suspicion about what that meant. I explained in Committee that it was relevant only to clause 2 on fingerprinting and to clause 3 on housing and that there was no question of failing to treat someone as an asylum seeker and of denying access to the normal determination system on the pretext that the claim had not been recorded. I undertook to consider whether that could be clarified by means of a change of wording. I am happy to move the amendment. I believe that all these amendments will do just that.

An asylum seeker will no longer be defined generally. Specific provisions are included in clauses 2 and 3, where they are needed. The concept of recording is now clearly limited—as it was, in practice, limited before—to the housing provisions of the Bill. It is essential for the proper handling of inquiries from local authorities that changes in entitlement, which no doubt we shall debate in the next group of amendments, should be triggered by information that is made available unequivocally from a central point in the Home Office. The result will be the same as that which was provided for in the initial wording, but I hope that hon. Members will find that the wording is now considerably clearer. Although it is still fairly complicated, it is now much easier to follow than before.

I ought to draw the attention of the House to one side effect of the change. It will benefit asylum seekers in a very small way when it comes to the fingerprinting power. The power to fingerprint will cease not when the asylum seeker has his name taken off the record but when the asylum application has been either decided or withdrawn. There will be no delay on account of having to wait until a record has been made of one or other of those outcomes.

I hope that the amendments will be welcomed by hon. Members. They clarify what led to a considerable discussion in Committee.

Mr. Corbyn: I want to deal with some of the points raised by the Under-Secretary. First, let me deal with the recording of information at the point when the person becomes an asylum applicant. The procedure now is that they apply and are interviewed and a file is made up which, at some point, arrives at the central registration. At what point are such people considered to be asylum applicants? If there is a delay in obtaining the information at the recording point and its being received at Home Office, that can cause problems for applicants or their families when they seek, as is their right, income support or housing benefit payments. That can cause difficulties for the families concerned, because, inevitably, people who arrive here seeking political asylum tend to be extremely poor or even destitute. I raise this matter because I know from experience that Kurdish people with whose cases I have been dealing have been unable to obtain income support payments for months because of that difficulty.

I am concerned also about the security of the information. As the Under-Secretary said, we shall be debating this later in the section dealing with housing. Information about someone seeking political asylum can be of interest to the regime from which the person is fleeing. Some years ago asylum applicants from Iraq faced

[Mr. Corbyn]

activities by agents of the Iraqi forces who attempted to attack them physically. Therefore, the security of the information and who has access to it are important matters. If, in that context, housing departments around the country are to be required to check with the Home Office whether an applicant has been recorded and is an asylum seeker, due care must be taken to ensure that the information is being passed to a proper representative of the local authority and not to somebody ringing up purporting to be such a representative. I know that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment may deal with that later.

In Committee we discussed the fingerprinting of asylum applicants, which is something that I and many of my colleagues find distasteful. Can we be assured that the fingerprinting will be kept entirely separate from any criminal records held by the police or the Home Office? At what stage are children too young for fingerprinting? The Minister refused to be drawn on that in Committee. He merely said that, where appropriate, older children will be fingerprinted. He did not give a minimum age limit below which that would not happen. This is an obnoxious section of the Bill and I should be grateful if the Minister would deal with those points.

Mr. Darling: The terms of amendments Nos. 26 and 27 are generally welcome and acceptable and are in line with the amendments that we tabled in Committee. However, in light of the amendments, can the Minister tell us when someone becomes an asylum seeker? Is it when the claim is lodged or at some other time? Logically, in terms of clause 1, it would be when the application is lodged.

When does someone cease to be an asylum seeker? It is clear from amendment No. 27 that it is when the claim has been "finally determined or abandoned". Would that apply universally throughout the Bill? That is not just important for housing; other matters may arise when it may be relevant to know whether someone is an asylum seeker.

Amendment No. 28 is not as welcome, because it is adding rather than subtracting from the terms of clause 3. The result is that people cannot be considered for housing under clause 3 until their claim is recorded. In other words, it is the same as the provision in clause 1. The guidance notes to which I referred earlier say in paragraph 9:

> "Where applications are forwarded from the ports or submitted by post there may be a delay of several days before the application reaches the Asylum Division for initial assessment. During this period the asylum applicant is protected by the provisions of the 1951 UN Convention and may not be removed from the country. At the point at which the Asylum Division consider the documents and determine that an asylum claim has been made, the claim will be deemed to be 'recorded' by the Home Office."

In other words, there may be a delay of several days—in Home Office talk that is a euphemism for a considerable time—in some cases.

8.15 pm

That is relevant in that if someone seeking housing is not an asylum seeker within the meaning of the Act—as it will be—they will not be housed. As we said in Committee, I understand the Government's anxiety to deter people and make life as difficult and unpleasant as possible—the Government made that clear in Committee—but once they are here and have submitted a claim, we cannot expect them to sleep on the streets. We must house them somewhere. I am concerned that amendment No. 28 may cause undesirable difficulties. The Under-Secretary will tell us whether those difficulties are intended. Unless he can assure us that the Home Office is likely to speed up its recording procedures, the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) will remain. Will the Under-Secretary comment on that?

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is in practice no addition to clause 3. There may be an increase in the number of words in the clause, but they will have their effect from the distance of clause 1(2). There is no change in effect, but I believe that the clause will read more clearly. I was seeking to achieve that greater clarity.

The recording for asylum seeking is relevant only for fingerprinting and housing. We debated these matters for a considerable time in Committee when I was seeking to reassure Opposition Members, particularly the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), that the use of the word "recorded" affects only the power to diminish the housing right by giving greater flexibility to the local authority and would set a term for when it is lawful for fingerprints to be required. It has no effect on the individual's right to have their case considered in this country or their right not to be returned to the country in which they say they have a well-founded fear of persecution. The protection of the United Nations convention is available to them as soon as they say that they want to seek asylum. We should not muddle things up. It must be put in the Bill so that there is a central list that local authorities know is authoritative. There is a delay of a day or two or longer before someone is accepted and given temporary admission as an asylum seeker and put on that central list. It does not undermine their rights under the United Nations convention or the Secretary of State's obligation to them.

The hon. Member for Islington, North asked about security. That is important and it was raised in Committee. Care must be taken that the knowledge that somebody has applied for asylum is not divulged to people who ought not to know it. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment will be able to add to what I have said. I think that what we—the Department of the Environment and the Home Office—are now considering will mean that communication on such issues will have to be by post. Although it may be slower, it is more secure, because the information would at least be directed to the people who should properly have it and who, it is reasonable to expect, will regard it with confidentiality as they do the numerous other pieces of confidential information that come their way in local authority departments.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether fingerprinting records will be kept separate—I think that he said "separate from the police". They will certainly be kept separately and will be available only—generally—for the purposes of the asylum division. However, if we receive proper inquiries in proper conditions from the police about an individual whose records we have, they will be made available to the police in the fight against crime. That is the case with any other information that the Home Office properly holds and it is what any other Government Department does and, indeed, what any other organisation would do. However, the records will not be part of the police's normal records and we would not expect to give

any other organisation—including the police—general access to them, but we shall respond when legitimate and proper requests are made to us by legitimate and proper authorities including, of course, the police.

The hon. Member for Islington, North also asked about the fingerprinting of children. We seek to take powers in the Bill to fingerprint every asylum seeker, including children. As I said in Committee, we do not look to take fingerprints of young children—I shall not say how young such children would be because it would depend on the circumstances. I hope that it will be done as seldom as possible, but the reasons why we need the power are threefold.

First, there can be an argument about whether a young person coming into this country is under 17 or under 18 or over 18 or over 19. Such a power would avoid that debate. Secondly, as has been said, children can come into the country by themselves and I think that it is right in such circumstances that we at least have the power to fingerprint them.

There is a third set of circumstances in which such a power might be useful, so it is sensible to take the power now in primary legislation. There is some evidence of fraud by those who seek asylum under different names moving children between them. Some asylum applicants claim for other people's children. It is necessary for us at least to have the power to take fingerprints to connect particular children to particular adults for reasons of social security fraud and so that when children are brought in at ports and, as the evidence sometimes suggests, abandoned, we may find it necessary to fingerprint children so that they can be connected to particular adults.

We do not want to fingerprint children—especially young ones—but I regret that it is a power which we must take. We shall have to see how our new tighter measures work and what they reveal in the way of difficulties before we decide administratively whether they should be used and, if so, how.

Mr. Madden: The Minister is well aware of the widely held view that the act of fingerprinting inevitably criminalises the person seeking political asylum and that it is offensive, especially when applied to young people and to children. In Committee, the Minister resisted an age limit. We were pressing that no young person under the age of 18 should be fingerprinted, but the Minister made it clear that it would be left to the discretion of immigration officers. Will he reconsider, because many of us believe that the offence would be reduced if there were a clear rule that no child below a certain age should be fingerprinted in any circumstances?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman covers many of the issues with which I have just dealt. I know that there is a feeling that the taking of fingerprints somehow criminalises, but that view is peculiar to this country. It is a normal method of identification in other countries and it is, of course, the effective way which is available to us. I do not suppose that the hon. Gentleman would object to our having pictures of every asylum seeker, but it is difficult to check 60,000 pictures. However, 60,000 fingerprints can easily be matched, collated and compared by experts. The hon. Gentleman is inviting us to abandon the one method which would enable us to check multiple claims, which will either catch people who are being dishonest or clear the names of the vast numbers of asylum seekers who are entirely honest.

The taking of fingerprints is a much more sensible, speedy and comfortable way to ensure that we have a proper record of who an individual is and to connect him with a particular time of entry and to discover with whom he entered than the lengthy inquisitorial questionnaires for trying to establish names and relationships, especially of a group of tired asylum seekers who have arrived at Heathrow late at night.

I understand the objection to fingerprinting, but there is no objection when it is common practice for every asylum seeker to be fingerprinted. The objection is emotional—although understandably so—rather than realistic and practical.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 3

HOUSING

Mr. Fraser: I beg to move amendment No. 21, in page 3, line 3, leave out from 'and' to end of line 4 and insert 'informs the housing authority dealing with his application—'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take the following amendments:

No. 22, in page 3, leave out line 19 and insert—

'(a) are informed by the applicant that he is an asylum-seeker, but'.

No. 13, in page 3, line 31, after 'accommodation', insert 'and his circumstances were the same as when the original application was made;'.

No. 15, in page 4, line 23, at end add—

'(9) For the purposes of subsection (1)(b) above "available"—

(a) shall only include accommodation occupied at the time an application is made; and

(b) accommodation currently occupied shall not qualify as being "available" unless it is available for more than 28 days.'.

No. 14, in page 4, line 23, at end add—

'(9) For the purposes of this section accommodation "however temporary" shall not include accommodation at present occupied where an applicant under Part III of the Housing Act 1985 is threatened with homelessness within 28 days from the date of his application.'.

No. 23, in schedule 1, page 8, line 5, leave out from 'made' to 'They' and insert

'are informed by the applicant that he is an asylum-seeker'.

No. 24, in page 9, line 5, leave out 'or is not'.

No. 17, in page 9, leave out lines 15 to 19 and insert 'which the applicant receives notification under section 64 of the Housing Act 1985.'.

No. 18, in page 9, line 29, after 'requested', insert 'in writing'.

No. 19, in page 9, line 36, leave out first 'an' and insert 'a housing'.

No. 20, in page 9, line 38, after 'inform', insert 'both'.

Mr. Fraser: This is a large group of amendments and the proposals are not all the same, so I shall break down the group.

Amendments Nos. 21, 22, 23 and 24 would remove from local authorities any duty to make inquiries about whether someone was a seeker of political asylum. Of course, if a local authority in the course of its ordinary homelessness inquiries becomes aware that a person is seeking political asylum, and if the facts behind his

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application for that asylum—that is the circumstances under which he gave up his previous home and in which he now claims to be homeless—are similar to those made in a claim for political asylum, his application for asylum becomes relevant. However, we think that such a duty is unhealthy and we know that the local authorities do not want such a task, which is effectively a duty to ask to see people's passports and to inquire about the immigration status of those asking for housing, to be placed on the housing list or for accommodation for the homeless.

There are several reasons for our approach. One is that local authorities already feel that they are overburdened with administrative problems and they are not asking for —indeed, they are resisting—these proposals. Another reason is that, once a duty has been placed on a local authority to inquire about the immigration status of an applicant, one creates distrust and bad feeling among those who will be resident in the neighbourhood, often for many years. We all know from our constituency experience that some people find it offensive to be questioned about their immigration status, especially when they were born and bred in this country, but, because of the colour of their skin or the pronunciation of their name, inquiries about their problems begin with questions about their status as immigrants rather than with the merits of their application for housing. We believe that such matters should be decided on the merits of the housing applications; that is when inquiries should begin. Investigations should not commence with examination of passports and inquiries about immigration status.

Once the facts have come to the attention of the local authorities it is up to them to take decisions about how to cope with housing requirements. Some local authorities will be so hard pressed to cope with homelessness that they may well feel that they cannot assist political asylum seekers whose claims have not yet been decided. However, some local authorities have a surplus of accommodation and may find—particularly if they have empty properties —that it is cheaper to deal with applications for temporary shelter by placing claimants in permanent accommodation as that will provide a rental income. That will prove cheaper than if authorities are forced to place applicants in temporary accommodation, as the Bill seems to do. Therefore, the measure should be resisted as it is the merits of housing applications that should be considered, not the technicalities of political asylum applications.

8.30 pm

Amendment No. 13 provides that, if the Home Office grants political asylum, the applicant's priority for housing relates back to when the application was first made. Under the Bill, someone could make an application to be treated as a homeless person and the application might be put on ice until the claim for political asylum status was determined. Once that has happened, as I interpret the Bill, consideration of the application will have to start again. Our amendment makes it clear that the priority of the application must relate to when the application for housing was first made, not when the Home Office or any other adjudicator made a decision about the political asylum application on appeal.

Amendment Nos. 15 and 14 deal with temporary accommodation. The view, not just of Opposition Committee Members, but of almost every social housing agency, is that the way that the Bill disqualifies an application from consideration by a local authority on temporary accommodation grounds is disgraceful. It is difficult to understand how the Government could have included words in the Bill that mean that a political asylum claimant is disqualified from receiving assistance from a local authority if he or she is in housing, however temporarily. Many people have commented on the fact that, if claimants have obtained accommodation in a church hall or are sleeping in a hall, or on a settee in an overcrowded flat, they will be disqualified from consideration by the local authority because they are deemed to be in temporary accommodation. That is disgraceful, and such proposals should be removed from the Bill.

Therefore, amendment No. 15 seeks to modify that obnoxious provision and would allow the political asylum applicant at least to qualify for temporary housing from the local authority when the accommodation that they are currently using is so insecure that it could disappear within 28 days of the application being made. Surely that minimum requirement should be built into the Bill. Amendment No. 14 has a similar affect to amendment No. 15.

We tabled amendment No. 17 because we believe that there is no need to mix landlord and tenant law with immigration law, which is exactly what the Bill does. It states that a person cannot have a secured or assured tenancy within a specified period of an application for political asylum.

Amendments Nos. 18 and 20 are comparatively minor drafting amendments. As the Bill stands, notices to applicants for political asylum do not have to be given in writing, and we propose to insert the word "writing".

Amendment No. 19 corrects what we believe to be a drafting error. While most of this part of the Bill refers to a housing authority, the word "housing" has been dropped in one place. At the heart of the amendments lies the proposition that, if someone is in need of housing, a hard-pressed local authority will not generally be able initially to meet that need with permanent accommodation. The local authority may take up to one year to decide whether the applicant qualifies for priority housing under homelessness legislation. That one-year period should be roughly the same as the time within which the Home Office —if it is to act efficiently—decides on the political asylum application. There should be no conflict between the time scale of the Home Office and that of the local authority.

However, if the Home Office spends—as it currently does—year after year considering applications for political asylum, and if we wish to act as a civilised country, we should not abandon a claim for accommodation for so long, which is what the Bill would do. Our proposals seek to cure that problem.

It is not only the Opposition who have criticised the Bill. We recently received a brief from the National Federation of Housing Associations which provided an adequate answer to the argument made by the Minister in Committee that one purpose of the legislation was to stop political asylum claimants exercising the right to buy. As the Minister will know, those in assured tenancies have no right to buy. In other cases, secured tenants have to reside in their accommodation for at least two years before they can exercise that right. Preventing claimants from exercising such a right seems a thin reason for justifying the Bill's provisions.

Housing associations and, I am sure, local authorities are reluctant to be forced into terminating tenancies and evicting people who have had applications for political asylum turned down. If applications are refused, applicants will eventually be required to leave the country. That matter should properly be left to immigration law; it should not constitute part of housing law.

I hope that the Minister will realise the anxiety that the provisions have caused, not just to applicants but to those who administer social housing and council housing. I hope that, even at this late stage, the thought that lies behind the amendments, if not the amendments, will be accepted.

Mr. Boateng: I support this group of amendments. Central to the concept of asylum is the notion of shelter, sanctuary and refuge. We cannot hope to fulfil the spirit and letter of international conventions on refugees unless we, as a receiving nation for refugees, accept responsibility for their shelter. That is a basic requirement, not only of international law, but of common humanity.

The amendments seek to mitigate clause 3, which strikes at the notion of giving shelter and respite to those driven from their homes by political upheaval. It does so in the most obnoxious way. It is discriminatory and we have yet to hear any convincing response from Conservative Members, the Department of the Environment or the Home Office to the charge laid at their doors by the Commission for Racial Equality that the clause is discriminatory in law.

Also—this is important—the clause seeks to confuse the role of housing authorities and the role of those with responsibility properly to regulate immigration in this country. It gives housing officers an invidious role and means that hard-pressed local authorities which are already struggling with a range of problems have to take on responsibility for an aspect of internal immigration control. That is not good enough.

It is offensive also because it puts in an intolerable position those organisations in our society that seek to meet the needs of refugees. Let me give a practical example of how the proposed law would undermine the work of the many voluntary organisations that are concerned with the refugee problem. Some time ago my own church—the Methodist church in Harlesden—took on responsibility for a number of Kurdish families who were in a crisis. The families had arrived recently and dreaded homelessness. Harlesden Methodist church is not rich, and it is in a deprived area of London, yet it took on responsibility for those Kurds.

What will happen when people housed in Church premises or temporarily in the homes of local church people apply to a local authority? Under this legislation as drafted, they will fall foul of the law. It is worth looking in detail at the wording of clause 3, under which such people cannot be deemed to be homeless because accommodation, however temporary, is available to them.

I should like the Minister to be able to tell me that my interpretation of clause 3 is wrong, that refugees such as those that the Harlesden Methodist church could not possibly house indefinitely would not, under this legislation, lose their right to local authority housing. The view that I am expressing is that not just of the Opposition but also of the Housing Law Practitioners' Association, the Law Society and the Children's Legal Centre—professional bodies that deal with housing issues day in and day out. Their reading of the legislation as drafted is that such persons would lose the right to local authority housing. In the sort of society that we hold this one to be, that cannot be right.

There is a question that this House will have to address in all seriousness: in those circumstances, what is the moral distinction between our treatment of Kurdish refugees—this being a relatively prosperous, secure and stable society—and the Turkish Government's treatment of the Kurds whom they allow to rot on their mountainsides? It is quite clear that there is a distinction in terms of scale, but what is the moral distinction? We could do better, and we ought to do better. All that these amendments seek to achieve is a situation in which applicants for refugee status are treated in the same way as all other applicants for housing. That is all that is asked. We are not asking that such people be given special treatment or any advantage.

What is particularly offensive about this clause in an abhorrent piece of legislation is that it is so blatantly discriminatory, so blatantly unequal. It seeks to achieve a purpose of which we ought to be ashamed. It seeks to make life that much more unpleasant for refugees in this country. It seeks to make life that much more intolerable for them as a group, presumably for the purpose—and it is a squalid and shameful purpose—of deterring people from fleeing to this country. That is the only interpretation that any objective reader can put on this legislation, and it is one that, for the sake of this House and of the nation, we must address.

Over many years, this country has established a tradition of receiving refugees, and, in general, we do not have much to apologise for. The tradition has been a bit battered and skimping of late, but it is still markedly better than that of many other countries. Even at this late stage, we must seek to avoid undermining it as fundamentally as this legislation would do. By the blanket way in which, in terms of housing, it treats applicants for refugee status, it puts us in danger of breaching our international treaty obligations under article 19(4)(c) of the Council of Europe social charter and of convention No. 97 of the International Labour Organisation. The Bill would put us in danger of breaching those provisions of international law.

Mr. Fraser: My hon. Friend does not exaggerate at all. In Committee, we gained the impression that, as a result of these amendments, the Government will be forced to denounce those conventions.

8.45 pm

Mr. Boateng: The situation is as stated by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser).

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Shame.

Mr. Boateng: I agree with my hon. Friend, to whose contribution we look forward—it is a shame. The British Government's representatives in the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation and the other bodies that have been mentioned are being put in a position that no representative of this country ought to be put in. This is against the letter of international law, but, above all, it is against the spirit that we in this House ought to cherish.

The Government say that asylum ought to be about shelter, about respite, but this obnoxious clause undermines that whole concept, and we should reject it by adopting these amendments. The Government can be sure

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that, if it is not rejected here and now, we shall return to the matter in the aftermath of the general election, and that the provisions will then be rejected resoundingly.

Mr. Watson: As my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), in his typically eloquent and forceful manner, has said, this is an obnoxious piece of legislation. Particularly obnoxious is clause 3, to which these amendments relate. The introduction of this provision marks the first occasion since the introduction of legislation on homelessness on which a particular group of people has been singled out for the application of a lower level of rights than is enjoyed by anyone else in the country. It treats all asylum seekers as a guilty group. It requires them to prove their innocence before they can have a roof over their heads.

The same thing applies to the regulations that accompany the Bill. They too treat these people as guilty by providing that, immediately on entry to the country, they may, against their will, be held in a detention centre and fingerprinted. To my mind, the Minister has not allayed our misgivings about fingerprinting. I wish to underline the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South.

Housing should have no place in the Bill. There is no need for clause 3. People awaiting a decision on whether they are to be classified as genuine asylum seekers should enjoy the same rights as anyone without a roof over his head who presents himself to a local authority as homeless.

A whole raft of organisations have made just that point to the Home Secretary, but apparently to no avail. I am talking about a group of highly respected organisations —Shelter, the Shelter Housing Aid Committee, the London Housing Aid Group, the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, the Law Society, the National Federation of Housing Associations, the British Refugee Council, and so on. Those organisations are experienced campaigners in such matters and at looking after people who find themselves in the near-impossible position of not having a home, yet their opinions have been ignored, as have those of the Commission for Racial Equality, which has stated unequivocally that it believes clause 3 to be racially discriminatory and

"in direct conflict with all existing statutory guidance on the homeless and race relations legislation."

Coming from a Government-funded body, that is a serious charge, but it has been quite simply denied by the Government with the brush of a hand. The Government's position has not been explained or defended. No one is convinced. The Government need not think that they are off the hook. If the Bill becomes law, a number of organisations—not least the Commission for Racial Equality—will continue to do their job and expose its pernicious nature.

A thinly disguised vein of racism runs right through the Bill. It is a bit like a stick of Blackpool rock in that respect. Throughout the Bill, interspersed with apparently reasonable propositions are entirely unreasonable and racially motivated proposals. In the case of clause 3, the racial aspect is not even thinly disguised.

Throughout the Bill, the Government's assumption is that most, if not all, asylum seekers are really economic refugees—people with little to fear, who simply want to find a better standard of living in this country than exists in their own. For generations, many of my fellow Scots have chosen to emigrate to Canada, Australia or New Zealand in search of a better standard of living. The Government tend to view asylum seekers in similar terms, but the parallel is a fallacy.

If any proof were needed, the Government's own figures assist in demolishing the argument. Since 1980, 83 per cent. of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom have come from nine countries—Ethiopia, Ghana, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Poland, Sri Lanka, Turkey and Uganda. It will not have escaped the attention of the House that all those countries have a recent history of political oppression or civil war. That is no coincidence, and it renders it even less likely—if it was ever likely—that people from those countries simply fancy a better standard of living and so present themselves on our doorstep.

That fallacy is undermined again by a Home Office paper produced in June 1990, listing those countries or territorial entities whose nationals or citizens need visas for the United Kingdom. Of a total of 77 countries, only seven are countries where the population is predominantly white. They are Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. Since the list was issued, Uganda and Jamaica have been added. The import of that is perfectly clear. Even if the Government could convince us that the intent of that list published by the Home Office was not racist—I maintain that they have failed to do so—they cannot escape culpability, because the effect of the legislation is racist. The same is true of clause 3 of the present Bill.

The amendment would rid the Bill of what I believe to be a major block, and would at the same time ensure that parity of housing treatment was afforded to asylum seekers. There is no reason why they should not enjoy that right. The Government should accept the amendments outlined in detail by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser), first, to ensure that the current situation under the homelessness legislation—whereby applications from asylum seekers and other homeless applicants are treated equally—was maintained. That has been the position until now, and there is no reason why it should not continue to be the position.

That should apply even before the Home Office decision on refugee status has been made. When asylum seekers have crossed that hurdle, they find another immediately facing them. They continue to face discrimination, being required to wait 12 months before enjoying a secure assured tenancy in the way that other homeless applicants do when they are granted accommodation. Surely that cannot be justified, and the Under-Secretary should have the good sense and good grace to admit it when he answers the debate.

Finally, local authorities should have the freedom to assess homeless applicants on the basis of housing need alone. That is the thrust of the legislation introduced as a result of great need throughout the country. Under the Bill as drafted, however, housing authorities will be forced to make the decision on the basis of having sought clearance from the Home Office on the status of the claimant. Surely, unless the claimant actually chooses to disclose the fact that he is seeking asylum, there is absolutely no need for that information to be passed to the housing authority attempting to house that person.

If the Government fail to accept the amendments, they will continue to stand accused, and rightly so, of introducing a Bill which, at best, is discriminatory and, at

worst, racist. I repeat that clause 3 is completely unnecessary and will not even assist in achieving what the Government claim to intend. The amendments represent an attempt to rid the Bill of some of its most pernicious provisions. If the Under-Secretary refuses to accept them, he will be sending a clear and, I say, shameful message to the rest of the world about the status of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Corbyn: I fully endorse the remarks of my hon. Friends the Members for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) and for Norwood (Mr. Fraser). Having sat through much discussion of the matter in Committee, I think that this is a shabby and nasty clause. If the homeless persons legislation can be altered in this underhand manner, what will happen next? If the Bill goes through in its present form and asylum seekers are no longer entitled to permanent housing, it will overturn the principle of the homeless persons legislation, dating from 1977, which was the principle of universal access to housing for those in housing need. The Bill will defeat and weaken that principle. What might the next stage be? I do not know what goes on in the minds of those who draft Bills such as this, which further restrict the right to public sector housing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood said, when asylum seekers arrive, they are admitted and their case is then processed. I know from experience that processing can take several years. Some of the cases with which I am dealing have been with the Home Office for many years—five years or more—yet clause 3 provides that asylum seekers can be housed only in temporary accommodation by local authorities. In my local authority area, if they are lucky, "temporary housing" means a property that the council has leased, usually for six months to a year at a time, so each six months to a year that family would have to move. I said, "if they are lucky" because that tends to involve a fairly reasonable standard of accommodation. If they are unlucky, it means hostel accommodation or bed and breakfast.

Who exactly is the Bill designed to punish? Has the Minister ever seen children growing up in bed-and-breakfast hotels? Has he seen the signs of depression among parents trying to keep a family together in a bed-and-breakfast room, looking every day at the same washstand, wondering whether breakfast would be any different that day from any other day, the lack of play space, the family rows that develop, and the enormous cost as well? The clause does not actually save any money—it costs a great deal more to local authorities. One wonders what the motive behind the Bill is, other than, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, the punishment of asylum seekers who wish to obtain housing, having been admitted into this country.

In Committee, there was a fairly unusual set of circumstances in which hon. Members raised points of order about the way in which the clause contravened the Race Relations Act 1976. When it was pointed out that it appeared to be in contravention and that the Commission for Racial Equality, a statutory body, issued a statement to that effect, Law Officers were eventually unwillingly brought along to the Committee and forced to try to defend the position. They did not make a very good job of it. The CRE was established under the Race Relations Act 1976 specifically to attack discrimination in this country, be it by an employer who refuses to employ black people or an institution that operates policies that systematically discriminate against a certain group of people. The Government are now adopting a policy in law which systematically discriminates against those who are seeking political asylum. I shall not repeat the facts that were given by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central in his excellent contribution, but he pointed out where most asylum seekers come from.

9 pm

What is to be the future relationship between local authorities, the Home Office and the immigration service? Were people appointed to work in local authority housing departments to be agents on which the Home Office could rely? A housing officer in a local authority, when interviewing a housing applicant, must ask whether he or she is an asylum seeker. A housing officer will not know, when a family walks through a door, whether they are asylum seekers. They will be seen as a family. Any black family who seek assistance from the local authority housing department will be asked to produce a passport or a form of identity so that a check can be made within the Home Office. There will be a system of passport checks or identity checks for non-white applicants or foreign applicants. That is how it will work. What does the Minister think that that will do to the relationship between local authority housing departments and those who require housing?

Local authority associations have pointed out the increased costs that the Bill puts on them. For authorities that actually have a surplus of or ready access to permanent housing, it is much more expensive to keep families in temporary accommodation than in permanent accommodation. But there is a moral case as well. The morality behind the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 was that society had a moral obligation to ensure that everyone in need—for example, those with dependent children, the elderly, or those at some risk—had a right to be housed. That Act represented an important step forward. This legislation, particularly coming from the Government's hand, is the start of the erosion of that principle.

Does the Minister honestly think that that is a fair, moral and just way of administering a housing policy or treating people who have come here to seek political asylum? I invite him to meet asylum applicants. They are not living very well; they fear being returned, and they are concerned about what has happened to their families. I deal with many asylum applicants. One sees the fear on the faces of those people. They know that their families are at risk in Somalia, Zaire, Uganda or wherever they have attempted to come from. They know that they may never see them again—obviously, they hope that they will. They know that they will be treated as second-class citizens. They receive 90 per cent. of income support instead of 100 per cent., again for no good reason other than as a form of punishment, and temporary housing, again for no good reason other than as a form of punishment.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South and I hope that, even at this late hour, the Minister will be prepared to reconsider, in the light of all the representations, the strength of feeling and the declaration by the Commission for Racial Equality that clause 3 is wholly wrong, wholly misguided, immoral, and should be withdrawn.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I do not entirely agree with the points that were made by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), but I am rather puzzled by one feature of this clause, and that is the statement in lines 25 and 26 on page 3. I do not understand why it states:

"and, accordingly, so long as he remains an asylum-seeker, any need of his for accommodation shall be regarded as temporary only."

I do not understand why it is not enough simply to stop after the words

"shall not continue after he ceases to be an asylum-seeker".

Is there any particular point in introducing at this stage the notion of "temporary" and in saying "shall" be regarded as temporary only instead of "may" be regarded? I should like to know why these two lines appear in the Bill.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I am glad to have the chance to reply to the debate. I think that it would be helpful if I took the opportunity, since the housing provisions were scarcely touched on in the Second Reading debate, to explore, before getting into the detail of the amendments, some of the principles behind the provisions in clause 3 and schedule 1 to the Bill.

The proposals modify the duties on local authorities under the homelessness legislation—part III of the Housing Act 1985—in relation to asylum seekers. The effect of the measures is to be fairer to a group of people who have not been referred to in this debate at all, that is, the people who are on the local authority waiting lists, a group of people about whom I am sufficiently concerned to see what effect this Bill has on them, although no one else who has spoken in the debate——

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Mr. Yeo: If I may develop the point a little more, I will give way in a moment.

It is important that we consider how the Bill affects those people whose right to permanent residence in this country is not in question and some of whom may have a long-standing connection with the area of the local authority on whose waiting list they remain. The effect of these measures will be to treat those people more fairly than they have been treated up to now, while continuing to give the protection that we all agree should be given to asylum seekers in genuine need.

Mr. Boateng: The Minister really ought not to take those who have contributed to the debate to task for neglecting the concerns of the people they represent in relation to the bloated and inflated housing lists and the housing deprivation in the areas that we represent. These are people that we see day in and day out. They are people about whom we write to his Department week in and week out. We are very concerned about them.

If he is concerned to do them justice, the Minister would do well to look at the practices of his own Department when it comes to grant-funding for local authority housing. He would do well to look at the disgrace of empty properties which his Department does nothing whatever to ameliorate before suggesting that we are not concerned about the people we represent. We are concerned about them; but, like them, we are also concerned about the fairness and equity of legislation that comes to the House—and the Minister should be concerned about that too.

Mr. Yeo: That intervention went on longer than I have been allowed to speak so far, but as the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) has made reference to empty properties perhaps I may point out that in his borough, while it was under Labour control, there were no fewer than 937 empty properties on 1 April last year; 5 per cent. of the housing stock run by Brent council was empty.

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Mr. Yeo: I am going to have some say in this debate.

Brent council had more uncollected rent than any other local authority in the whole of England and Wales—this was during the last year that it was under Labour control. I have no doubt that if it remains under Tory control long enough the figures will improve—they could hardly get worse. Forty-four per cent. of the rent—£15 million—was uncollected. So we need not take lessons from the hon. Member for Brent, South when we see what his Labour colleagues on that council did when in charge of the housing resources there.

I do not yield to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) one iota in my anxiety to get people out of unsatisfactory temporary accommodation, particularly bed-and-breakfast accommodation. I share his concern. It is precisely because I do that I find it deplorable that we have so many Labour-controlled local authorities with huge numbers of empty properties. There are more local authority properties in this country that have been empty for more than 12 months than there are families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

One way of helping to limit the extent to which people are placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation is to ensure that those who have access to permanent accommodation in this country are people who have also established a permanent right to remain here.

Under the current homelessness legislation asylum seekers can qualify for permanent housing from a local authority if they meet the same tests as anyone else—that is if they are unintentionally homeless, or threatened with homelessness and in priority need. In general, this means families with children, pregnant women or those vulnerable for some other reason. In my view, and in the view of many other people, it is illogical that someone whose right to remain in the country permanently is still under question and has not been established can secure permanent accommodation in that way.

Current estimates are that up to 5,000 asylum-seeker families are likely to qualify for housing help under the homelessness legislation in this year alone. However, the absolute numbers, while disturbing, are not the overriding problem. The real problem is that those asylum seekers impose a disproportionate burden on certain local authorities, particularly in London, because asylum seekers tend to concentrate either at the point of arrival or in areas where there is a refugee community already established. Some local authorities are having to accept a duty to secure housing for 250 or more asylum-seeker households a year. That exacerbates existing housing pressures and means that local people on waiting lists will have an even longer wait for permanent housing.

Under our measures we propose two extra tests for asylum seekers who are waiting for their asylum applications to be decided. First, do they have reasonable

accommodation at the moment, even if it is only temporary? Secondly, is there any other accommodation they could reasonably go to?

The Bill provides that, if they meet all these tests, the local authority has to provide only temporary accommodation until the asylum application is decided. It will be up to the local authority to decide how to fulfil its duty to provide temporary accommodation, which might be a short-term tenancy in its permanent stock.

I should like to correct a recurring misconception that has been repeated this evening by the hon. Members for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and for Islington, North—that requiring an authority to provide only temporary accommodation to an asylum seeker does not mean that that asylum seeker must be placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. As a matter of fact, it does not mean even that the local authority has to put such a person in temporary accommodation. The local authority has discretion, which it can use, to put that person in permanent accommodation if it so wishes. If it desires——

Sir Timothy Raison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again because this is exactly the point that I have been trying to raise. I repeat that lines 25 and 26 of clause 3 state:

"accordingly, so long as he remains an asylum-seeker, any need of his for accommodation shall be regarded as temporary only."

I thought that my hon. Friend said that the local authority could provide temporary accommodation, or whatever form of accommodation it wanted; but that is not what the Bill says.

Mr. Yeo: I would have come to my right hon. Friend's point in due course but, as he has raised it now, I shall deal with it now. The lines to which he has referred are intended to make it clear that by providing accommodation on a temporary basis the local authority will, indeed, be fulfilling its statutory duty to the asylum seeker, but the Bill does not compel the local authority to provide only temporary accommodation. If it wishes, it can use its discretion to do more than that and to offer permanent accommodation. We are simply saying that, to satisfy its statutory responsibility, it will be sufficient for the local authority to offer only temporary accommodation to the asylum seeker.

Sir Timothy Raison: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but I urge him to look again at those words because they do not seem to match what he has been saying. I still think that the paragraph could have ended at the beginning of line 25 with the word "seeker". I still cannot see the point of the remaining words.

Mr. Yeo: I know that my right hon. Friend has a close interest in housing and remember that he participated in the last housing debate in which I spoke. I shall certainly look again at the wording, but I am quite clear about our intentions. If our intentions are satisfied by the wording as it stands, we would not wish to alter it. The intention is to make it clear to a local authority that it has no duty further than the provision of temporary accommodation to an applicant for housing who is an asylum seeker. It has discretion to go further than that, but no duty to do so. If the wording to which my right hon. Friend has referred does not achieve that, I will of course look at it again.

Mr. Fraser: Surely the reluctance to allow the local authority discretion is also reflected in paragraph 5 of schedule 1, which says that the accommodation, if the local authority chooses to provide it, cannot be secure for within one year of offering the accommodation. Does that not reinforce the point made by the right hon. Gentleman?

9.15 pm

Mr. Yeo: No. The answer is the same. The Bill is designed to make clear the local authority's statutory obligation. It is, as I have said, to provide temporary accommodation. If the local authority, in its own discretion, chooses to go further than that, it will be free to do so. This is just setting out what the minimum provision by the local authority has to be in order to satisfy its statutory responsibilities.

I return to the misconception, which was repeated by the hon. Members for Norwood and for Islington, North, that temporary accommodation means bed and breakfast. I was very glad to have the acknowledgement of several Opposition Members that there are local authorities with a surplus of accommodation; they do not always acknowledge that quite so readily. Unfortunately, in practice, not many of the areas with large numbers of asylum seekers coincide with areas where there are surpluses. Nevertheless, it is nice to have the recognition that they sometimes do. Those local authorities are perfectly free to allocate their housing, which would be an ordinary council house or flat, to an asylum seeker on a temporary tenancy. So there is no question of an authority which has a surplus in its own stock having to send asylum seeker applicants to bed-and-breakfast accommodation; it will of course use the stock that is available to it.

That is a misconception that we heard in the Standing Committee and have heard again this evening, and I am glad to have an opportunity to make it clear that a local authority will fulfil its duty by providing accommodation which could be a short-term tenancy in its permanent stock. The local authority could also arrange a tenancy in the private sector. It could be in a hostel, or, in those areas where no alternative could be found, it could be in bed and breakfast. But it does not have to be if there are alternatives, and I believe that all hon. Members will agree that it is preferable to avoid bed-and-breakfast accommodation if possible.

If asylum seekers are subsequently recognised as refugees or otherwise granted leave to remain in the country, they will have the same rights under the homelessness legislation as anyone else. If they are refused leave to remain in the country, they will not have rights under that legislation.

Amendments 21, 22 and 23 seek to deny the housing authority the opportunity to inquire of an applicant under the homelessness legislation whether he is an asylum seeker and say that instead it should rely on the asylum seeker to volunteer the information.

Given that under the proposals in this legislation the local authority will have a different duty under the homelessness legislation to an applicant who is an asylum seeker as compared with any other applicant, it is imperative that a housing authority, in order to carry out its duty, be able to establish whether an applicant is an asylum seeker. It would be unreasonable not to allow an authority to ask an applicant whether he was an asylum seeker. The lack of this ability might result in an asylum

[Mr. Yeo]

seeker who had not revealed his status to the local authority being provided with permanent accommodation to which he was not entitled. The hon. Member for Norwood expressed great concern about the fact that these decisions would be made on the merits of housing issues. Let me say again that one of the factors which determine the merits of a housing application will be whether the applicant is an asylum seeker.

The Bill will make it simple for the authority to establish whether an applicant is an asylum seeker by applying to the Home Office for information, which the Home Office will have a duty to supply. This will assist authorities in establishing the facts. Perhaps I had better deal with the confidentiality point when we discuss how the information will be obtained and whether it is in writing or otherwise. But we have already touched in Committee on the safeguards which we intend to put in place to ensure confidentiality of information.

Amendment No. 24 illustrates the absurdity of the proposals on identifying asylum seekers. Paragraph 4 of schedule 1 provides that anyone who gives false information, or withholds information about whether a homelessness applicant is an asylum seeker, with the intention of misleading the authority is committing an offence. The amendment seeks to limit the circumstances in which an offence is created to a case where the applicant, or indeed any other person, tells the authority that the applicant is an asylum seeker when he or she is not.

It would no longer be an offence for the homeless applicant to deny that he or she was an asylum seeker when that was the case. That is clearly absurd. It is hard to think of any circumstances in which an applicant for help under the homelessness legislation would say that he was an asylum seeker when he was not. It is equally absurd that an asylum seeker should be able to lie about his status with no fear of prosecution.

Amendment No. 13 seeks to make ineffective our proposal that the local authority should have the opportunity to reconsider a homelessness application when the asylum seeker is granted leave to remain in this country.

The principle behind clause 3 is that it is reasonable to distinguish under the homelessness legislation between an asylum seeker who has only a temporary right to remain in the country and someone who has a right to live here permanently. Under our proposals an asylum seeker who is homeless and in priority need will have a right only to temporary accommodation until the asylum application is determined. Subsection (4) provides that in the case of a successful asylum seeker a new application under the homelessness legislation is deemed to have been made immediately before the asylum case was determined. That gives the local authority the opportunity to consider whether the former asylum seeker is still in priority need and thereby qualifies for help under the homelessness legislation.

Mr. Boateng: What would happen in a case in which, in the interim between making the application and its successful adjudication, a woman who had had a child and therefore qualified for housing lost that child and became a single person? On the deemed reapplication, would that woman therefore lose her priority and, in addition to losing her child, lose her home? If not, why not, given the wording of the legislation?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman is right to the extent that the circumstances in which the applicant was at the time of the deemed reapplication would be those which determined whether he or she still qualified as being in priority need, not the circumstances which obtained at the time of the application for asylum. If circumstances had changed, it is possible that someone who was in priority need at the time of making the application for asylum might no longer be in priority need by the time the application had been granted or the person had obtained exceptional leave to remain. It is for exactly that reason that the provision is included.

It is because we are concerned, as the hon. Member for Norwood said he was, with the merits of the housing case that we want to make sure that when someone's asylum application has been determined and has been successful we have another look at the circumstances. That seems only sensible and proper. I think that the majority of local authorities would like to have an opportunity to look at the up-to-date position.

Mr. Boateng: Does not the case which I have outlined give the Minister some concern? It is by no means hypothetical; I have constituency cases of women who have come to this country as refugees from Somalia and who have subsequently lost children. Such women suffer the trauma of being a refugee, followed by the trauma of loss of child, followed by the trauma of enforced loss of accommodation. In those circumstances, it is not as if the local authority would have discretion. The duty to house would have ended. In those circumstances, the woman would be dispossessed. Does not that give the Minister cause for concern?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on two counts. The authority would still have discretion. An authority is at liberty to house people whether they are in priority need or not. It is merely that the duty of the authority to do so would have ended, but the authority would retain the discretion to continue to provide housing. Nothing in the Bill affects that discretion. The Bill merely removes any duty to house an asylum seeker who is not in priority need, and it removes the duty to provide permanent accommodation for someone while that person is an asylum seeker. The hon. Gentleman is also wrong because it is possible for someone still to be in priority need even if there are no dependent children, depending on the position of stress in which the individual finds himself. That is already part of the homelessness legislation.

On both grounds there could be circumstances in which a woman who had lost a child—depending on the precise facts—could still be classified as being in priority need. Even if that were not so, the local authority would still retain discretion, if it chose to use it, to provide housing. The logic of the deemed reapplication is overwhelming.

The fact remains also that a successful asylum seeker who remains in priority need has nothing to fear from the process of a deemed reapplication being made at the time when the status of the asylum seeker in this country has been determined.

Amendments Nos. 14 and 15 raise two distinct issues that we spent some time debating in Committee. The first issue is whether the House considers it reasonable that a

local authority should be able to take into account, in deciding whether an asylum seeker is homeless, not only whether he or she is currently occupying reasonable accommodation but whether there is some alternative accommodation—perhaps with family or friends—to which he or she might reasonably go before turning to the local authority.

I believe that the majority of hon. Members agree with that entirely reasonable proposition. The majority of asylum seekers—three out of four—are already in this country at the time of making their application. In all probability, therefore, they will have established local contacts that are sufficient to help them find alternative accommodation. We are not saying that an asylum seeker who arrives at Heathrow will be required by the local authority to seek alternative accommodation, regardless of expense or practicality. He or she will not have to search for accommodation across the country. The test is governed by what is reasonable. Local authorities will have discretion, which they are already used to applying in relation to the homelessness legislation. Ultimately it would be a matter for the courts to decide.

The second issue that is raised by amendments Nos. 14 and 15 is when an asylum seeker might be regarded as threatened with homelessness. As the hon. Member for Norwood said, this is an issue about which various outside bodies have expressed concern.

I shall outline how the threatened-with-homelessness provisions currently apply in the homelessness legislation and how they will apply to asylum seekers under the proposals in the Bill. Under the 1985 legislation, a person is threatened with homelessness if he or she is likely to become homeless within 28 days. In that event, the local authority is obliged to consider the homelessness application in the usual way. If it is satisfied that the applicant is likely to become homeless unintentionally and is in a priority need group, it must take reasonable steps to ensure that that accommodation does not cease to be available for his or her occupation. That could mean assisting the applicant in such a way that he can stay on where he is, or it could mean that once the person has become homeless at the end of the period, there is alternative accommodation available for his occupation.

The hon. Member for Brent, South raised the case of the Kurdish refugees who were housed by the Harlesden Methodists. The position is clear. If the period available to the refugees were less than 28 days, they could establish that they were in priority need. Existing legislation does not mean—this is what Opposition Members are seeking to achieve for asylum seekers by means of the amendments—that the housing authority has a duty to secure alternative accommodation the moment that the threat of homelessness within 28 days has been identified. It would be a waste of resources to adopt that approach if accommodation were still available for another four weeks. It is more sensible for a local authority to take on the responsibility at the end of the period that is currently available.

In Committee, I undertook to check that the provisions of the 1985 Act applying to people threatened with homelessness apply equally to asylum seekers under the Bill's proposals. They do nothing to affect the continuing application of the relevant provisions of the 1985 Act that are not explicitly modified by our new proposals.

Hon. Members expressed concern on behalf of voluntary bodies about our proposals, but the Bill does not present any disincentive to voluntary organisations to continue making provisions.

9.30 pm

Amendment No. 17 seeks to alter the provisions in the Bill relating to security of tenure. The Bill provides that, in the case of an asylum seeker, the right to a secure local authority tenancy or a housing authority or private assured tenancy does not arise until 12 months after notification to the landlord by the Secretary of State for the Home Department that the applicant has ceased to be an asylum seeker—though the landlord's discretion remains. As I said before, it is illogical that someone should be able to obtain a secure or assured tenancy until their right to remain in this country has been permanently established.

Amendments Nos. 18, 19, and 20 deal with safeguards against unauthorised disclosure of information about an asylum seeker, which was debated in Committee at some length. We are of course anxious to preserve the confidentiality of information obtained from the Home Office, and I have made arrangements with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department to ensure that the normal mode of communicating between the housing authority will be in writing. I am satisfied that there is no need to include that provision in the Bill. We will make administrative arrangements, but as I gain the impression from Opposition Members that they want to conclude the debate—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—I will be happy to explain them in writing.

Amendment No. 19 seeks to clarify that the Secretary of State may pass on information about an asylum seeker only to a housing authority. I am happy to accept that amendment to ensure that the position is made clear in the Bill.

Amendment No. 20 seeks to ensure that the Secretary of State notifies both the housing authority and the applicant in writing of the outcome of the application for asylum. We believe that that is unnecessary, because paragraph 6(3) of schedule 1 already makes that clear. I therefore urge the House to accept amendment No. 19 but to reject the others.

Mr. Fraser: As we want to make progress, I will comment only briefly on the Minister's remarks. He reads well, but the people who write for him do not write very well. When the hon. Gentleman expresses compassion about people on the housing waiting list, he should remember some of his Department's other records. The Minister represents a Department which has the worst local authority housing construction record in peacetime this century. We do not hear much from the Government about people on the waiting list except in debates such as this. The Minister represents a Department which has also increased the number of homeless by 300 per cent. since his party took office. Although the hon. Gentleman reads well, he does not learn very well.

When the Minister says that the status of asylum seekers should be relevant to local authority consideration, he repeats the point made by my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) and for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). The moment that status

[Mr. Fraser]

becomes a prime consideration, discriminatory factors become relevant. An asylum seeker's housing application should be considered on its own merits.

The best construction that can be put on clause 3 is that it represents a disincentive to those who seek political asylum, and the worst—judging from some of the Minister's remarks—is that it is intended to serve as a scapegoat for the Government's appalling housing record.

Amendment negatived.

Amendment made: No. 28, in page 3, line 37, at end insert—

'(5A) For the purposes of this section and that Schedule a person who makes a claim for asylum—

(a) becomes an asylum-seeker when his claim is at any time (whether before or after the coming into force of this section) recorded by the Secretary of State as having been made, and

(b) ceases to be an asylum-seeker when his claim is recorded by the Secretary of State as having been finally determined or abandoned.'.—*[Mr. Yeo.]*

Clause 4

CURTAILMENT OF LEAVE TO ENTER OR REMAIN

Sir Timothy Raison: I beg to move amendment No. 31, in page 4, line 25, after 'person', insert

', other than a student on a recognised course,'.

Clause 4 provides that when a person who already has limited leave to enter or to remain in the United Kingdom has his or her claim for asylum refused, the Secretary of State for the Home Department may curtail that limited leave for him or her to remain. Amendment No. 31 is designed to exempt students on recognised courses from the risk of removal until they complete their courses. Whatever may be the arguments in respect of clause 4 as a whole, there is a strong case for exempting students. My hon. Friend the Minister seemed to concede that pretty fully in Committee, when he said:

"Of course, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is not obliged to curtail leave and there will be various cases in which he will not wish to do so, such as that of a bona fide student who has made an unsuccessful application before the end of his course because of events at home."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B,* 5 December 1991; c. 156.]

What could be clearer than that? Why should we not exempt the bona fide student?

I have been trying to imagine a case in which a student might be able to abuse the system if my amendment were accepted. He might try to use asylum to prolong his stay, but, if his case for asylum were not accepted, he would have to leave at the end of his course, just as he would if he had not made a bid. If it were accepted, he would not have to go anyway.

It could, I suppose, be argued that the student could delay his asylum application until nearer the end of the course, so in a sense the problem does not arise. As I understand it, however, the draft immigration rules require prompt and full disclosure of material factors. The Government seem to be saying that if someone is going to apply for asylum, he should do so sooner rather than later. In the light of that, it would surely be most unjust for a student to have to give up his studies as a result of an unsuccessful asylum application.

No doubt my hon. Friend will point out that this is no more than a discretionary power; he will say that the key word is "may", and that the provision will not be applied unjustly. I do not believe that my hon. Friend would apply it unjustly, as I have great respect for him and for the fairness that he exercises; the applicant, however, may not be aware of his sterling qualities. He may simply recoil at the possibility of losing his education, and feel that he cannot take the risk entailed in that. In such circumstances, a student might withhold a perfectly reasonable application for asylum—an application that would succeed. Surely it cannot be right to use the possibility of the termination of his course to deter the exercise of what is accepted as a legitimate right.

It is, of course, possible that my amendment is not valid technically. I feel, however, that the case for my argument is overwhelming; indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister confirmed that in Committee. My amendment neither should nor would help a bogus student to prolong his stay; there are other ways of dealing with that. I hope that my hon. Friend—who has handled the whole issue so sensitively—will feel able to accept the amendment.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I support the amendment. Those of us whose constituencies contain universities know that such circumstances arise. A young person may arrive at university, intending to stay for two or three years, with no knowledge of what may happen in his country of origin. He cannot plan when to apply for asylum; that will be dictated by the situation in his country.

Those who remember the Iran-Iraq war will recall that students from both countries found themselves in very difficult personal circumstances. I cannot imagine a case in which someone could use an application to act other than reasonably. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) pointed out, those who apply for asylum and are unsuccessful will stay only for as long as their education visas last; there is no way in which they will abuse the system.

I hope that the amendment will be accepted—or, at least, that its spirit will be accepted, and it can be altered in another place.

Mr. Darling: We support the amendment. Both the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) and the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester), being former Ministers, speak with some authority, and I hope that they have persuaded the Minister to accept the amendment.

We should remember that the whole point of clause 4 is to provide a disincentive: the applicant must be aware that, once asylum has been applied for, he runs the risk of having his existing leave curtailed. The intention is to discourage someone from applying for asylum. It is not just students who are in this difficult position. Visitors sometimes find that they are in the same position. A couple of my constituents have visitors from Croatia where the situation will change between the time that they entered the United Kingdom and the time that they are due to leave this country. The point made by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury about students has even more force. Events may have dramatically changed in the home country after the lapse of three or four years.

If the Minister intends to say that we should not worry because of the Secretary of State's discretion, I ought to mention to him that if the point of clause 4 is to discourage such applications and it then becomes known that the discretion is to be used generally, it will undermine the

Government's reason for including clause 4. If there is general agreement that if a student applies for asylum he or she should be allowed to continue the course, even if the application is unsuccessful, I cannot see what harm will be done. The right hon. Gentleman dealt very well with the possible abuses that the Minister might conjure up. I look forward with interest to the ingenuity that the Minister will use to reject the amendment. What would be even better, however, would be for the Minister to tell us that if additional amendments are to be tabled in another place, this one will join them.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) made a sympathetic and persuasive case, though the different categories are dealt with in the rules rather than in the primary legislation. We do not intend routinely to use curtailment in all cases where there is extant limited leave. Discretion will be exercised, taking into account all the circumstances of the case. The bona fide student who continues to meet the requirements of the rules is a good example of someone whose leave will not be curtailed. That is not the only example. The same will apply to business men, work permit holders and others.

However, we cannot assume that all those who gained entry as students should not have their leave curtailed. Some of them may have no real intention to pursue a serious course of study and to leave this country when it is completed. A specific exemption would only encourage more dubious attempts to get into that category.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) said that he could not imagine that there would be no merit in any student's claim to be a student. If he had seen as many cases as I have of people who gained entry as students, but who have not attended college for many months, sometimes even years, I believe that he would modify his opinion. There are people who gained leave as a student but who are not students at present, and they have not been pursuing a course of study for a considerable period of time.

Mr. Lester: The amendment refers to students being granted leave until they have completed their course. Therefore, one assumes that the students about whom we are talking are pursuing a course of study at a university or college.

Mr. Lloyd: The trouble is that they do not complete the course and that they have no real intention of doing so. As soon as the authorities contact them, many of these people embark on yet another course.

The new power is aimed primarily at those who enter as visitors and seek asylum shortly afterwards. It is right, however, to be able to consider other categories. Even though I cannot accept my right hon. Friend's amendment, I can assure him that the Secretary of State will not automatically curtail the leave of a student simply because his asylum claim has failed. If a student appeals, due to the refusal of his asylum claim, he can at the same time appeal against the curtailment of his leave as a student. His case would, however, already have been very sympathetically considered if he was in good standing with his college and if his desire to complete his studies was convincing.

I am sorry that I cannot accept my right hon. Friend's amendment, but I hope that he has been somewhat encouraged by what I have said.

Mr. Maclennan: I listened with care to what the Under-Secretary said, but he has not answered the case put by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison); nor has he said what mischief would arise from accepting the amendment. If his concern is with those who are claiming to be students but are not pursuing a course of study, that would negate the effect of the exclusion. They would be subject to the law if they were not students.

The other place would be wise to return to this matter, as there is strong support for it in this House.

9.45 pm

Mr. Lloyd: I understand what the hon. Gentleman said. However, that would mean that it would be open to the so-called student to appeal in the ordinary appellate system and there would be an opportunity for that person to remain in this country for a considerable time in the queue for the hearing of the appeal.

Sir Timothy Raison: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to the debate.

I am not persuaded by the argument of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that this would be a way of policing students who are trying to abuse the system by not pursuing their studies or are trying to stay indefinitely. I remember from my Home Office days that that problem exists and it was one with which I had to grapple. However, I do not think that this is the mechanism for dealing with it.

I know that the House wants to get on to Third Reading and I do not want to prolong matters, but, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said, this has not been fully answered. It would be desirable if the matter were pursued in the other place and I hope that it will be. Having said that, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 7

CARRIERS' LIABILITY FOR TRANSIT PASSENGERS

Amendment made: No. 29, in page 6, line 30, leave out 'or any similar characteristic' and insert

', origin or other connection with any particular country or territory'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Clause 9

COMMENCEMENT

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 7, line 21, leave out 'or any similar characteristic' and insert

', origin or other connection with any particular country or territory'.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

Schedule 1

HOUSING OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS: SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendment made: No. 19, in page 9, line 36, leave out first 'an' and insert 'a housing'.—*[Mr. Fraser.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Peter Lloyd.]*

9.47 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): I am glad to have an opportunity of making a few remarks at the end of the consideration of the Bill. Other business has

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

prevented me from playing a bigger role in the earlier proceedings. I want to place on record on behalf of my constituents my opposition to the Bill.

I remember the first debate on the Bill, just a couple of months ago. In almost his opening sentence, the Home Secretary assured the House that there was no question of the Bill playing the numbers game. The preparation for the Bill began in the summer, when the tabloid Tory newspapers made it clear that part of their pre-electioneering was to play a racist card by supporting the introduction of this Bill. There was a spate of stories about the country being "swamped" or of there being "too many asylum seekers" and of the "scandal" of thousands of "bogus" applicants.

On 3 November, *The Sunday Times* managed to combine nearly all those elements in one sentence when it said:

"Tory MPs, particularly those with seats in the Midlands, plan to fight Labour hard on its pledge to oppose the government's legislation cracking down on immigrants seeking bogus political asylum."

Virtually all those elements were contained in a single sentence in one article. Of course, that is not an objective appraisal.

As anyone who has read the Committee proceedings or heard the debates in the Chamber will know, the word "bogus" is not an objective term but a purely subjective analysis which changes as do the rules and regulations, which the Government regularly tighten. People who do not come under the ambit of these rules and regulations are described as bogus.

What have we been talking about in terms of numbers, an issue with which the Home Secretary began his contribution—45,000 or 50,000 asylum seekers last year? What is that? It is perhaps the gate at a Manchester City/Manchester United local derby football match. The reality is that only about 5 per cent. of the estimated 17·5 million refugees in the world get as far as or seek to come to Europe, and only a small fraction of those ever apply to come to the United Kingdom. Those statistics are a matter of public record, but it is hard to find them reflected in many of the newspaper articles that I mentioned, especially those in the tabloids in recent months.

It is also a matter of public record, because the Home Office admitted it to me in a parliamentary answer some months ago, that in 20 of the past 27 years—from 1964 to 1990—there was a net outflow of people emigrating from this country. For those who wish to know, during those 27 years there was a net outflow of 786,000 people. That is a matter of public record, so there is no question of this country, in the immortal words of the former Prime Minister, being

"swamped by people of an alien culture".

The Bill has been designed to make asylum not easier but harder. It will be made harder because of carrier fines and the associated regulations. The speeding up of the process which is part of the Bill does not bode well for a fair hearing. The Minister will know of a case that I raised, which has occupied staff in his office in recent weeks. It involved a Sikh constituent who, if I had not intervened, would have been sent initially to Germany and possibly back to the Punjab, where his brother was killed some months ago.

I was able to raise the case because of the powers of intervention that hon. Members still have, but those powers will be side-stepped by the tightening of the procedures and by the denial of an oral hearing which the Bill will make law. If, in that case or in future cases, the so-called removal to the port of first entry is to be the norm, and if no assurances are received from the country to which the person is sent, I predict that the Bill will result in people being sent to their death.

As Nye Bevan used to say, one does not need to look into a crystal ball if one can read the book. We know about the famous case of the Tamil seekers after refugee status —five were sent back to Sri Lanka and four were tortured. That is a matter of record. I could mention other cases, but I know that other hon. Members want to speak. Any hon. Member who has a substantial proportion of constituents with families residing in other countries could provide case after case to show that the Bill will put at risk the lives and safety of constituents' families.

As I said, the Bill was politically aimed at the pre-election period. The newspapers that give support and succour to the Tory party played their role well, not only by softening public opinion in advance of the House's consideration of the Bill, but by poisoning workers' minds with their repeated stories of con men, of racketeering and of massive social security fraud. How those stories seemed to escalate in the weeks before the Queen's Speech when the Bill was first introduced in the House.

We are talking about people fleeing persecution by some of the world's worst dictatorships, fleeing countries racked by civil war under repressive regimes often supported and funded by countries in the west in general, and even by this country in particular.

I have been politically active for 20 years. The first case with which I dealt as an individual was that of refugees from Chile, who had arrived in Coventry in the early 1970s with no clothes and no furniture. My grandfather's radio, which is still playing, was given to the children of the first Chilean refugee family to get as far as Coventry in the early 1970s. Throughout that period and until today, we have received families from Africa, Asia, the Punjab, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and other countries. The Bill would make the job of hon. Members that much harder—it is designed to do so. Many Tory Members have written—not least my neighbour the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher), who wrote an article a few days ago in a Coventry magazine stating that it was because hon. Members were clogging up Home Office procedure with their interventions that the Bill had to be introduced.

We know why the Bill has been introduced. It seeks to criminalise those who come to this country seeking political asylum. As "Newsnight" showed last night, several hundred of the people who get as far as these shores find that Britain's hospitality leads them to the detention centre at Harmsworth or to prison, where they languish for weeks or months.

I make no apology for saying that the Bill legitimises and underpins the arguments of racists in this country, which, if unchecked, could lead to the horrors that have occurred in France and Germany in recent months, where people have been burnt out of hostels and there have been several attacks. Just before Christmas, a black woman in my constituency—Mrs. Morrison, who is not a refugee —was threatened with a baseball bat, her phone and television cables were cut four times and she had beans and grease thrown at her windows and dog excreta smeared on

her doormat. She fears for her own life and that of her 12-year-old son. If the Bill is enacted, the proposals that it contains will legitimise, underpin and give support to racist organisations such as the National Front and the British National party, which seek to take on to the streets the racist and neo-Nazi ideas that unfortunately gain succor from those who play the numbers game in the House or elsewhere.

As a socialist, I believe that people who are fleeing war and persecution should be welcomed into this country as they have been so many times by past generations. Our parents and grandparents welcomed the people from Europe, eastern Europe, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa who were seeking to flee persecution. It should not only be Russian composers and South African athletes with friends in the Tory Cabinet who are allowed here in a matter of days: all those who flee persecution should have a right to seek and find asylum and refuge in this country.

I hope that, when Opposition spokesmen make their wind-up speeches later, and when, as I hope, Labour form a Government in the weeks and months ahead, they will make it clear that they will not only make it easier and quicker for refugees to be granted the right to stay in this country, but withdraw support from those regimes from whom people are fleeing—such administrations should include the Governments of Sri Lanka and India as long as oppression continues in the Kashmir and Punjab—and embark on a sufficiently large programme of public works to build homes, hospitals and schools so that unemployment and other social conditions do not allow racism to breed in the cities and towns of Britain.

There is no justification for the Bill. The Home Secretary seems to take it as conclusive proof that anyone who arrives with bogus documents is, by definition, a bogus refugee or asylum seeker. Most people fleeing a country in which there is oppression do not have time to queue up at a British embassy or high commission for the necessary paperwork. The very nature of their departure means that they often seek refuge here via a third country. The fast track proposed in the Bill will weaken or even fatally flaw the ability of such people to seek refuge in this country.

It is a nasty little Bill, and the House should drop it into the dustbin tonight. If it is enacted, I hope that a future Labour Government will give a categorical pledge to repeal it and the earlier racist legislation on which it is built. I wish to ensure that families in my constituency and others up and down the country are united instead of divided, as they are at present. I want to ensure that those who come here to save their lives, those who have been restricted and suppressed in their own countries, are not further restricted and suppressed when they seek refuge in this country, which has traditionally been a haven for refugees and, in my opinion, should continue to be such a haven.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Asylum Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

10 pm

Mr. Maclennan: The House wishes to come to a conclusion on this Bill tonight.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) has just spoken with very great passion and feeling. I do not believe that what we have heard from him was the least bit simulated. He spoke with conviction, and he spoke for many people—people outside this House as well as in it—who share his abhorrence of the measure that Parliament is passing with so little scrutiny.

Today the House is being asked to conclude its deliberations against a background of Government uncertainty about the administration of the provisions of this legislation, which is almost unparalleled and unbelievable. When the Bill was being introduced the House was advised that the prime responsibility for representing and giving advice to people seeking asylum would rest with the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service. Today we have been told that this is not so. The whole foundation of the argument put forward by the Minister was shot from under his feet by himself. At lunch time today the Minister published amendments to the immigration rules. In doing so at such a late hour he made it impossible for the House properly to consider the amendments and to decide whether, in the whole new framework of rules, the Bill is appropriate. That is not the way in which the House should deliberate in respect of such a sensitive matter.

We have not received from the Minister, either today or on an earlier occasion, a direct answer to the accusation of the Commission for Racial Equality that at least some of the Bill's provisions are racially discriminatory and are counter to the provisions of the Race Relations Act 1976. It is a very serious matter that the chairman of this Government-appointed body, Mr. Michael Day, should make such a charge. I refer in particular to clause 4, which relates to the duties of local authorities—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) has not been so closely involved at all stages of the debate on this Bill as to know what Mr. Michael Day and the Commission for Racial Equality have said about it. That body, which is charged by statute and was appointed by the present Government to protect our society from racial discriminatory measures, has made the charge to which I have just referred. It is a very serious charge, and the Government have not answered it. No doubt, however, it will come up again in another place.

Upon that House falls a heavy responsibility to ameliorate this rotten little measure, which does nothing to enhance the reputation of the Ministers who brought it forward. I should say in passing that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office has undertaken his role with honour and distinction. He has attempted the impossible by at least seeking to explain, if not to justify, what is in the Government's mind. Justification would be impossible. The Home Secretary, of course, has nothing to say. The Home Secretary is the Home Secretary. *[Laughter.]* I use a rhetorical device that Mr. Edward Pearce is accused of having used too frequently.

I hope that this Bill will come to grief in another place and that it will come back to this House much improved. Those in the other place who have experience of the law—and there are a number of former Home Secretaries

[Mr. Maclennan]

there who have direct experience of handling these matters —would do well to justify their revising role by making hefty revisions to the Bill before it returns to this House.

10.4 pm

Mr. Madden: As I have been in the Chamber throughout today's proceedings and attended every sitting of the Standing Committee, I should like to take this opportunity again to place on record my opposition to the Bill.

Every time we consider the Bill, it becomes clearer that the provisions are wholly unnecessary and unjustified. It has become clear today that it may well be impossible to administer the provisions and, clearly, the Bill may have the most dangerous consequences for the men, women and even children who seek political asylum in the United Kingdom.

Last year, we were told by the so-called popular press, and by many right-wing Conservative Members, that hundreds of thousands—possibly millions—of people were queuing up to seek political asylum in the United Kingdom. That propaganda campaign caused widespread alarm among many sections of the community at the prospect of all those people flooding into the country seeking political asylum.

We were told that many of the applicants—indeed, the majority of them—were bogus, and we have heard that again today. How can that be squared with the Government's information that nine of every 10 people seeking political asylum are genuine—indeed, must be genuine because they are granted exceptional need to remain or full political asylum? We know from the Government's information that the bulk of applicants are genuine and we have no reason to believe that, in future, the majority will be bogus.

The Government have tried to persuade us that the Bill is necessary to allow applications for political asylum to be considered more quickly. None of us supports the system which has meant that many seeking political asylum have had to wait up to a year—in some cases, for several years —to have their applications considered. None of us can justify arrangements whereby appeals can take months and months to be held. But if the Government want to expedite political asylum applications, they can do so very easily. They could have done it years ago by devoting more resources to enabling applications to be considered quickly and efficiently and by appointing more officials.

It is clear that the real purpose of the Bill has nothing to do with the creation of a fair and efficient system for considering political asylum cases, and everything to do with political opportunism and the Government's desire to pander to right-wing sections of the Conservative party —which have been in evidence again today.

The Bill is without friends. Opposition to it is considerable. Its opponents range from the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster to organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality which, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) said, has warned that the Bill may well breach the Race Relations Act 1976.

The Bill may also breach our obligations under international conventions. It will certainly intimidate men, women and even children and deter them from applying for political asylum in Britain. The message that the Bill sends out clearly and loudly is "You are unwelcome here, go away." The Bill is part of a process that is now under way to create a Fortress Europe, so that the European Community can turn its back on those who are seeking refuge from violence, from persecution, from war, and from torture.

The Bill is unnecessary, dangerous and offensive. How, in 1992, can the House agree to a system whereby we routinely photograph and fingerprint even children? Those provisions are obscene. As we have heard today, the housing provisions will create enormous distress and difficulty for many families waiting for decisions on their political asylum applications.

This is a bad, squalid Bill. I hope very much that it never reaches the statute book but, if it does, I hope that the next Labour Government will repeal it.

10.10 pm

Mr. Boateng: This is indeed a squalid, unworthy little Bill. It is discriminatory both in its intent and in its effect. It has been given a thorough going-over in Committee and in the House. Some concessions have been wrung out of the Government, but, nevertheless, it remains an unpleasant Bill. It remains a piece of legislation, the effect of which is to put this country in breach of its international obligations.

Earlier, reference was made to the specificity of the provisions. The international provisions which the Bill causes us to breach are article 19(4)(C) of the Council of Europe's social charter and the International Labour Organisation's convention No. 97, two articles of international law on which this country has been obliged to renege in pursuit of the Government's purpose—a purpose which does the House no credit.

At this time of the year, we in the Christian calendar celebrate the flight of Our Lord and his parents, delivered from Herod, into Egypt. At this time of the year, we might reflect on the Bill, because one can be in no doubt that if Our Lord and his parents were to seek to gain entry into the United Kingdom, they would have great difficulty. They would be turned away at the gates. If they were admitted, they would not only find themselves in danger of being fingerprinted—Mary, Joseph and child; such are the provisions of the Bill—but, were they to obtain temporary accommodation in a church or synagogue in excess of 28 days, they would be denied local authority housing.

This is a strange measure—strange because we have not had established in the House a sufficient reason for introducing a measure of this nature, the extent of which is so thoroughly discreditable. There is still time for the Government to make a better Bill in another place. They can begin by getting rid of clause 3 and its impact on existing housing legislation. Housing and immigration do not mix in terms of the functions of the House in creating new law. They should never have been intermingled in such a way, and they make the Bill even more unworthy than it would otherwise be.

There have been attempts to make the presentation of the Bill more palatable by stating that bona fide refugees need have nothing to fear and that our traditions of hospitality to bona fide refugees remain as they have always been. An attempt has been made to gloss over the more objectionable characteristics of the Bill by saying

that they are necessary to preserve the general public good of those settled and permanently resident in the United Kingdom.

If that is true, the Government can give credence to their own case by recognising the very real needs that local authority associations of all political hues have made known to the Home Office and to the Department of the Environment. They can recognise the representations of the Churches, the voluntary organisations, the housing associations and the Housing Corporation, which seek to deal with refugees who are legally in this country. They can heed the representations made to the Home Office and the Department of the Environment about the impact in and on our constituencies of the presence of bona fide refugees.

What happens in schools in my constituency when young Somali boys and girls, many of them unaccompanied, find themselves there? What happens at Copland school in my constituency where they have had to deal with several score of Somali refugees without a penny more of resources from the Government? When the headmaster, the governing body and the local education authority, under both Conservative and Labour, have written to the Department of Education and Science and the Home Office about this gap in the funding of local authority provision for refugees, answer comes there none. Not a penny more comes from the Department of the Environment, the Home Office or the Department of Education and Science to deal with the resettlement of genuine refugees and to deal with the impact on local communities of refugees with special needs and problems —refugees already traumatised when they enter this country.

If the Government are genuine in their concern for bona fide refugees, they will put their money—our money —where their mouth is and do something to help local authorities tackle the problem. Until they show that they genuinely care about refugees and about the reputation of this country, we will be entitled to treat the Bill, as we do, with contempt.

10.16 pm

Mr. Corbyn: As one who spoke against the Bill on Second Reading, right through Committee and in today's proceedings, I want to put on record my continuing opposition to the Bill and my contempt for the purpose of it and the way in which the whole thing has been presented.

It has been accompanied, as other hon. Members have said, by a particularly nasty campaign in the popular press, with day-to-day stories of alleged social security fraud, including telephone fraud, with a story one day of excessive numbers of people seeking asylum and, on the next day, a story of multiple asylum applications. Yet at no stage are these stories properly collated or the issues surrounding asylum properly set out. It is part of an attempt to create a fear, a xenophobic attitude in the country, and it has been promoted by the Home Office and, in particular, by the Home Secretary with his disgusting and disgraceful speech to the Tory party conference some months ago.

It is against that background that there is a refusal by the Home Secretary and the media to recognise the real reasons why people seek asylum or the fact that the vast majority of people who have sought and obtained some form of safe haven have not come to western Europe or north America but have been cared for by the poor in the poor countries of the world. It is in Mexico, India, Iran and the Sudan that one finds very large numbers of people who have sought asylum, living in awful conditions and with very little help given by the wealthy west.

Yet all these things—the use of the words "flood" and "waves", the supposedly large numbers of asylum seekers trying to get into western Europe—are used to stoke up fears. On the back of this xenophobia, the racists are at work in Europe: there have been 800 attacks on the homes of people in western and eastern Germany who have sought to work there for economic reasons. Racist violence is going on there. There have been attacks on the streets of France. Racist attacks happen once very 30 minutes in this country. That is the agenda of the new Europe. I am not saying that the Bill is entirely related to all that, but the atmosphere surrounding it and the purpose behind its introduction lie in the direction of stoking up racist feelings in this country when we should be heading in the opposite direction.

The Bill makes it more difficult for those fleeing from persecution to gain entry into this country. As a result of the Trevi group and the Schengen and Dublin agreements, it is now more difficult to gain entry into western Europe as a whole. Those who readily condemn people who seek political asylum should spare a thought for what those who have suffered from political and social persecution have gone through. They should talk to those who have been tortured in Somalia or Zaire. They should talk to those who fled from the regime of Saddam Hussein—not last year when that was a popular cause because of the Gulf war, but five or 10 years ago when the British Government were happily trading with Saddam Hussein. They should talk to those who have fled from Iran and to those who managed to get out of the national stadium in Chile in 1973 when 20,000 people were killed by that fascist dictatorship—another one that was armed by the British Government.

We need some understanding of what it is like to have to leave one's country, possibly never to return—because that is what seeking political asylum is all about. Our attitude should recognise what we would want for ourselves if we were in the same situation—a place of safety, welcome and understanding. Instead, we offer a limited right of appeal with limited access to social security. We positively refuse to grant such asylum seekers permanent housing.

The Bill will go down in history as one of those nasty reactionary measures introduced by a particularly nasty and reactionary Government who are seeking to run with a nasty tide. We should recognise the victims of persecution not as the cause of a problem, but as the victims of a much wider problem. We should adopt a more welcoming and supportive attitude towards them. The Bill is wholly wrong and inappropriate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) rightly said, the Bill is wholly friendless and should be opposed by the House.

10.21 pm

Mr. Darling: Although we have had long discussions on the Bill both in Committee and on the Floor of the House, it would be wrong to let the Bill pass its Third Reading without comment. There is no doubt that the problems of asylum seekers and of the movement of people in Europe

[Mr. Darling]

and elsewhere are real problems, but they need to be tackled rationally instead of being seen as an opportunity to score political advantage.

Hon. Members will remember that the Bill was yet another Tory flagship. The Home Secretary promoted its cause throughout last year—in the House, at the Tory party conference and wherever he could—but he has not even spoken today. It is no coincidence that the same Secretary of State who introduced the poll tax, which is now floundering, has abandoned the central plank of the Bill—the attempt to remove legal aid from those who seek asylum. It is clear from today's debate that legal advice and assistance is here to stay—at least for the time being. The Government's chosen replacement is now to be broken up because it cannot discharge the task that the Home Secretary was so confident only 11 months ago that it could. The rules that were published at lunch time today have made substantial concessions. I am glad of that and pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department who has attempted to fashion a workable Bill out of what started originally as a piece of political rhetoric.

However, the Bill remains ill thought out. It was rushed out in an attempt to gain party advantage, which has failed, rather than being an attempt to tackle the real problem. The Committee and Report stages have effected substantial changes and we understand that more changes are to be proposed in another place. However, the Bill remains fundamentally flawed. I refer especially to the lack of a right of appeal. The clauses that are designed to discourage people from seeking asylum serve no other purpose.

Nothing in the Bill will stop asylum applications. As long as there is conflict and famine throughout the world, people will apply for asylum. The challenge for us is to deal with those applications fairly and thoroughly so that we do not run the risk of sending people back to countries where they may be tortured or face death. The Bill has failed to rise to that challenge. It was designed for entirely the wrong reasons. It has failed to meet the many challenges that it needs to meet. For those reasons, we shall oppose its Third Reading.

10.25 pm

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This is a good and necessary Bill and I reject utterly the inflammatory, indeed palpably ignorant, charge by the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and other hon. Gentlemen who, like him, have suggested that it is racist. It is designed to give effect to the 1951 United Nations convention in a way that ensures that all those who arrive in the United Kingdom with a well-founded fear of persecution, wherever they come from, will find a safe haven here; and that those who have no such fear and no other humanitarian or appropriate reason for remaining, wherever they come from, will be obliged to leave.

I urge the House to give the Bill a Third Reading and speed it to the other place.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 298, Noes 216.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Division No. 47] **[10.25 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*

Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce

Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Housing (Hyndburn)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10.37 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): Even though it means delaying my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment on what has already been for him a busy day, I am grateful for the opportunity to raise once again the problem of housing in Hyndburn. It has been the subject of previous debates, of many ministerial visits to Hyndburn and of delegations that I have arranged to meet Ministers at the Department.

The principal housing policy of the Conservative Government, who were elected in 1979, is simply defined: an increase in home ownership. Measured against that simple objective, the policy has exceeded beyond all expectations. Home ownership has increased from 55 per cent. in 1979 to 67 per cent. in 1990.

The people of Hyndburn did not need the encouragement offered by the new Conservative Government in 1979 to buy their own homes. They realised many years earlier that home ownership was a good thing. A high level of home ownership had already been achieved due to the self-restraint and independent nature of the people there, and the way in which, over the years, they resisted the onslaught of municipal socialism in housing.

Eighty-one per cent. of people in Hyndburn own their own homes, and therein lies its problem. The Government successfully concentrated on providing effective policies to promote new owner-occupation but, perhaps undertandably, they did not pay sufficient attention to the problems of areas such as Hyndburn, where a high level of owner-occupation had already been achieved.

Important though policies such as the sale of council houses, various low-cost ownership schemes, and the removal of constraints on private builders are in a national context, they are of only minor relevance in Hyndburn. With home ownership there at 81 per cent.—it has been approaching that figure for many years—it will be obvious that a substantial number of owner-occupiers are in the lower income groups.

Hyndburn is a low-wage area, even by comparison with other parts of Lancashire—let alone the rest of the country. Consequently, although owner-occupiers have made their mortgage payments over the years, they had nothing left to pay for major repairs or improvements. That combination of a high percentage of home ownership and low wages makes Hyndburn a special case.

In addition, a high proportion of houses in Hyndburn are far from soundly constructed. The majority were built in Victorian times to provide homes for workers in neighbouring cotton mills. Although Hyndburn's stone-built terraces were in some ways more soundly constructed than much modern, system-built housing, they were erected at such a frenetic pace—to cope with the enormous growth of industry—that many corners were cut.

In particular, insufficient care was taken to provide those properties with secure foundations, in an area notorious for its difficult ground conditions. The legacy is a private-sector housing stock that is now fast deteriorating and in need of massive investment in terms of repairs or replacement.

It is a depressing thought that, despite years of economic prosperity and high employment in the borough,

about 7,000 of its houses—approaching one quarter of the total, and nearly all of them in the private sector—are officially designated as unfit for habitation, or fit but lacking basic amenities.

My concern is that those factors—a high percentage of owner-occupation, a history of low earnings, and a poorly constructed housing stock—are not sufficiently taken into account when resources are allocated. It is clear that a high percentage of Hyndburn's housing is coming to the end of its useful life, and that major investment is needed if wholesale demolition in the not-too-distant future is to be avoided.

It is not too late. The houses in question could be saved and be improved by imaginative schemes, such as the Quadrangle—a Bradford and Northern housing association scheme in Oswaldtwistle. Alternatively, they could be left to deteriorate even further, so that, in a few years, they will be beyond repair or improvement.

It is much cheaper to improve existing housing stock than to demolish it and rebuild. Such a policy allows people to remain owner-occupiers, rather than become tenants. However, unless some way is found of providing additional resources to help Hyndburn, it will be 30 years before every owner-occupier household there can enjoy basic amenities in a property free from major defects—even on the unreasonable assumption that there will be no further deterioration meantime, and no improvements to basic standards. The average terraced property would reach its 130th year before being brought up to an adequate standard.

I do not want to give the impression that it is all doom and gloom. Far from it. In 1979, Hyndburn borough council spent only £300,000 a year on improvement grants. Under a Conservative Government, £2 million a year was spent. In addition, because Hyndburn's problems were recognised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) when he was Minister for Housing, Hyndburn was one of the first areas to benefit from the Government's estate action programme.

Generally speaking, there has been all-party support for the housing initiatives that have been undertaken; so it was particularly unfortunate that, when the Housing Minister invited the housing chairman, Councillor Mrs. Betty Court, to London to discuss Hyndburn's housing problems, the controlling Labour group—which included Labour's current parliamentary candidate—voted, to its shame, against allowing her to come.

Those who know Mrs. Court will realise that it would take more than a silly party political decision to deter her from doing all that she could to improve Hyndburn's housing; she came at her own expense. We saw the Minister together, and as a result £1 million was spent on Huncoat, one of our most rundown estates at the time. That money came from the estate action programme. Since then, we have benefited greatly from the same programme in Fern Gore, Spring Hill and Clayton le Moors.

That is good news for many council tenants, but there is still much to be done—not least on the Trinity street estate in Oswaldtwistle, and in other areas of the borough where estates are in need of urgent action if the accommodation is to be of reasonable standard. Despite the considerable capital investment of recent years, there are still many council houses with serious defects and a lack of amenities.

We benefited, too, when—after intense pressure from many of us—the Government decided to extend the neighbourhood revitalisation services scheme. I was very pleased when Hyndburn was one of the areas to benefit. The scheme's contribution to the improvement of houses in the east Accrington area has been invaluable. Housing associations have also played an increasingly important part in the provision of much-needed accommodation for our growing number of elderly people. Schemes totalling over £3·5 million are in this year's programme.

Over the past 10 years, the council has dealt with the very worst housing, but we are now left with a great mass of properties built within a couple of decades. Inroads into the problem have been made, mainly in the areas that have been targeted for housing action area activity. A series of housing action areas, and a couple of general improvement areas, have represented the main thrust of the council's improvement activities since 1980. There remains, however, an enormous and urgent problem.

The council's housing capital programme has been reduced from a peak of £6,676,000 in 1989-90 to £4,306,000 in 1991-92, with a similar figure likely this year. That reduction has unfortunately coincided with an increased demand for mandatory renovation grant expenditure—mainly owing to the introduction of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, whose provisions I welcome but which has caused further problems for the borough. For example, the original programme expenditure on renovation grants in 1990-91 was £1,420,000. To meet the demand for the new mandatory payments, that had to be increased to £2·3 million.

To accommodate the increased expenditure on renovation grants, expenditure in other areas, especially repairs and improvements to council stock, was severely curtailed. Two contracts for the completion of estate action schemes were postponed from the 1990-91 programme, and could not even be proceeded with in 1991-92. That, I feel, is particularly unfortunate.

The Department of the Environment was advised of the council's dilemma, and encouraged the council to bid for a supplementary credit approval. In the event, the application was not approved. That resulted in an overspend of £520,000 in 1990-91, which the council covered by using the provisions of section 65 of the 1989 Act.

If the council was to meet its statutory duties to approve mandatory grants within six months, it would have been impossible for it to redeem the overspend from the 1991-92 programme, and it would therefore have had to roll it forward. As a consequence, I arranged a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), which took place on 8 May.

In addition to making a request for supplementary credit approval of £520,000 to deal with the 1990-91 overspend and an SCA of £1 million in 1991-92 to handle the legal duties of the council in respect of the urban renewal legislation programme, we also requested a supplementary credit approval of £300,000 to allow a clearance-rebuild partnership with Wimpey Homes, through an imaginative scheme, to harness housing compensation for investment in new housing provision.

As the Minister will be aware, the aspiration of many owner-occupiers is to maintain their tenure. The scheme that we outlined sought to achieve just that, in an area

[Mr. Ken Hargreaves]

where there is a gap that otherwise cannot be filled between the compensation resulting from clearance and the price of a new house.

The Secretary of State visited Hyndburn on 18 June and said that he was greatly impressed by the co-operation between Hyndburn borough council and Wimpey Homes. The result of that meeting on 8 May was an SCA of £900,000—clearly short of the amount requested, but welcome nevertheless. The scheme devised by Wimpey Homes is now going ahead under the title "resale covenant scheme". That, too, is welcome news.

In this short debate, I have sought to demonstrate that we have the needs and ideas for dealing with them but that we do not have the resources to enable us to do so. I want those people who have been waiting for a considerable time for grants to improve their properties—many of whom I have visited in their homes, where I saw the conditions for myself—to be able to obtain grants quickly. If they cannot, and if there is not an even greater increase in resources than we have had in the past, we shall be struggling in Hyndburn not to increase home ownership, which is in line with Government policy, but to maintain it at its present level.

I understand that, once again, a sum has been set aside by the Department for SCAs. I urge the Minister to ensure both that Hyndburn receives a substantial part of that sum and that our bid for estate action resources for the Trinity street estate in Oswaldtwistle leads to money being made available.

10.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) on raising this extremely important issue and I pay tribute to him for his vigorous and consistent advocacy on behalf of his constituents. He has played an important part in securing for Hyndburn sympathetic treatment of its housing problems over the years. He referred to his meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning on this issue.

It is gratifying to hear that Hyndburn has made good use of its past allocations of housing investment programme resources and that particular benefit has been derived over a number of years from targeted estate action money. The upgrading of rundown council estates, coupled with management improvements and proposals for the diversification of housing tenure that have been developed in consultation with tenants, the local community and the private sector, remains a very important element of the Government's housing policy.

It may be helpful if I set the debate in context. It was in response to a question from my hon. Friend on 6 December 1991 that the Secretary of State announced the Government's decisions on the allocation of housing resources for 1992-93. I understand my hon. Friend's concerns on this score, but I must point out to him that the total resources are very substantial. Gross expenditure by the Housing Corporation in supporting housing associations—now the principal provider of new social housing—will be £1·77 billion in 1992-93. That will allow more than 50,000 new houses to be approved next year—25 per cent. more than the current year and four times more than in 1990-91. In addition, £1·7 billion has been allocated to local authorities in the form of housing investment programme allocations for 1992-93. Of that sum, £1·3 billion was in the form of general purpose allocations. The balance of £400 million has been allocated in the form of specified capital grant for private sector renewal to assist councils in their grant aid to private owners and in their expenditure on renewal areas.

The sum of £364 million—an increase of a third over the current year—will be allocated next year to maintaining the commitment to tackling the most difficult estates under the estate action programme. An additional £215 million has been set aside for spending on housing action trusts over the next three years. That is sufficient for the housing action trusts that have been established in Waltham Forest and Hull and for four additional housing action trusts that we hope will be created in other areas.

Historically, housing resources have been distributed to regions by means of the generalised needs index, a series of indicators measuring relative housing need. In 1991-92 both annual capital guidelines and specified capital grants were distributed to regions by means of the GNI; and within regions to local authorities on the basis of 50 per cent. by GNI with the other 50 per cent.—a discretionary element—allocated by Ministers on the recommendation of regional housing controllers.

We have, however, been concerned for some time about the undue emphasis placed on formulae in distributing housing resources. The almost automatic receipt of resources by an authority regardless of its performance has done little or nothing to encourage greater efficiency and effectiveness in capital investment or in protecting that investment through improved management. Nor does it deliver the quality of service that tenants seek and deserve.

For 1992-93—next year—we concluded that we should move to a system under which good performance was rewarded through higher allocations, and clear incentives were held out for all authorities to raise their standards to the level of the best. In the current bidding round, therefore, authorities competed for a 60 per cent. share of annual capital guideline resources while 60 per cent. of specified capital grant was distributed largely on the basis of local authorities, actual performance as demonstrated by expenditure patterns.

I am aware—and my hon. Friend mentioned this in his speech—that there is disappointment in Hyndburn about the level of the borough council's housing investment programme allocation for 1992. A total allocation of £4·156 million—which is made up of an ACG of £2·406 million and resources for specified capital grant of £1·75 million—represents a 3 per cent. increase over the current year's £4·029 million. In relative terms, Hyndburn has fared better than most authorities in its region.

I know that there is particular disappointment that the Department did not agree to fund Hyndburn's three bids for new estate action schemes next year. The allocation does, however, include provision of £1·4 million to enable the ongoing projects at Fern Gore and Spring Hill to continue. Refusal to fund the new bids is a reflection not of the quality of the schemes submitted but of the success of the estate action programme generally. There is now immense competition for what are inevitably finite resources and many more schemes have been submitted than there were resources to distribute. It is true—this is

good news for the tenants for whom all this is being done—that the quality of the schemes coming forward is higher than ever before.

One of the important features of the estate action programme is the requirement for local authorities, wherever possible, to make contributions to the schemes matching those provided by the Government. That demonstrates a clear local commitment to turning round their problem estates and enables total resources committed to improving the worst estates to be "stretched" further. In Hyndburn's case we were conscious of the fact that the local authority is already working hard to make its contribution to ongoing schemes and that approval of new schemes in 1992-93 might have faced the authority with commitments it could not reasonably meet in that financial year. The regional controller for the Department has already suggested to the council that its priority should be satisfactorily to complete the schemes already embarked on before moving on to fresh ones.

My hon. Friend acknowledged—I welcome it—that Hyndburn has benefited greatly from estate action. He also referred to Mrs. Betty Court, a former chairman of housing for the council. I am glad to acknowledge the excellent work that she did during her time as chairman.

The statistics for Hyndburn tell an interesting story. Since the inception of the estate action programme in 1985 Hyndburn has received estate action resources totalling almost £10 million which has enabled almost 2,000 houses on no fewer that seven estates to be improved. That represents nearly half of Hyndburn council's housing stock of 4,179 dwellings. I know that there have been notable successes amongst the schemes that have been carried out, and I believe that that augurs well for the future. It bears repeating that the priority must be the successful completion of the current schemes.

Hyndburn has a well-earned reputation for "enabling" the private sector and housing associations to play their part in providing accommodation. I am aware of the problems of affordability in the borough and the considerable thought that has been given in particular to helping local people whose properties are the subject of clearance to stay in owner-occupation by seeking innovative schemes to help them to bridge the equity gap between the compensation from their old house and the cost of a new one.

As my hon. Friend acknowledged, housing associations continue to fulfil a central role in the borough in the provision of new rented and special needs housing. In the three years to 1990-91, £7·6 million of provision received project approval from the Housing Corporation, producing 233 new dwellings. Over the next three years, between £6·1 million and £8·2 million will be spent in the authority's area by housing associations on housing for sale and for rent.

I was not surprised that my hon. Friend referred at length to the particular difficulties in the private sector, not least in relation to the expenditure on mandatory renovation grants. As he said, there is a long tradition of owner-occupation in north-east Lancashire. A very high proportion—85 per cent.—of houses in Hyndburn are privately owned, which is way above the regional and national average. Again, statistics are important: 65 per cent. of the stock was built prior to 1919, much of it with specifications inadequate by today's standards; 27 per cent. of the stock—7,500 dwellings—is unfit; and 30 per cent.—8,500 dwellings—needs substantial repair work. These problems are, of course, compounded by the relatively low incomes which often limit the ability of residents to invest in their property. My hon. Friend has made those points to us on several occasions.

Hyndburn is to be commended for the energy and effort that it has put into getting to grips with private sector problems. The declaration of the east Accrington renewal area facilitates a strategic and comprehensive approach to deal with the problems of the area, and I know that progress is also being made towards a renewal area declaration in west Accrington. Renewal areas encourage the development of corporate, comprehensive strategies for identified areas and, by focusing resources and efforts in that way rather than merely responding to unprompted demands, provide a sound basis for progress in regenerating those areas.

Some of Hyndburn's stock is beyond economic repair and it would be a waste of resources to seek to prop up houses which have no long-term future. It is perfectly proper for Hyndburn to use its specified capital grant allocation to pursue clearance and I know that this is an issue which my regional controller has recently discussed with the borough council.

I understand the concerns expressed about the difficulties of coping with levels of mandatory renovation grant applications. Hyndburn's problems are not untypical of other districts and towns in the north-west where there is a preponderance of older, run-down housing occupied in the main by poor people. Inevitably, until the new system introduced by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 shakes down, it will remain difficult to predict with certainty just what the likely demands for resources will be.

In the current year, the distribution of specified capital resources by the generalised needs index led to some anomalies. As security against demand exceeded resources in some areas, we purposely set aside a special allocation of supplementary credit approvals totalling £25 million—my hon. Friend referred to it—to cater for that eventuality. After the points made by my hon. Friend last year, Hyndburn was a major beneficiary, receiving a supplementary credit approval of £904,000.

Before reaching decisions on how specified capital grant resources should be distributed from the centre for 1992-93, we looked closely at the pattern of needs for resources to deal with problems of private sector stock condition and the actual spend performance of regions and individual authorities on renovation grants. A clear picture has emerged of where stock conditions were most serious and where resources to tackle those problems were inadequate. We therefore decided upon a distribution methodology which allocated resources to regions on the basis of the total number of statutorily unfit properties identified. This established a much clearer link between actual problems on the ground and the likely need for resources to tackle them.

Within regions, as I have mentioned, 40 per cent. of resources were allocated to local authorities on the basis of need as identified by the number of unfit properties and 60 per cent. mainly on the basis of actual performance as determined, in the main, by local authorities' spending patterns. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there is a clear logic to having a system which not only recognises need but pays particular attention to a local authority's track record and its ability to deliver.

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

As we had expected, the new approach favours regions like the north-west with its higher proportion of pre-1919 owner-occupied dwellings—a legacy of its industrial heyday. In fact, in 1992-93 a total SCG of £52·9 million has been allocated to the north-west region as compared with £45·2 million in the current year—a 17 per cent. increase. Significantly, the new figure closely matches the likely regional outturn for the current year and will therefore, I hope, go some way towards mitigating the mismatch between demand and resources which became evident in the current year.

Hyndburn's SCG for 1992-93 of £1·7 million is 19 per cent. more than this year's £1·47 million. Coupled with the supplementary credit approval of £904,000 already received, it should provide a sound basis for continuing progress to be made in renewing the borough's urban fabric. I appreciate that, in common with other authorities, Hyndburn would like a larger allocation.

What is often not fully appreciated is that the new finance system set up by the 1989 Act gives local authorities flexibility to meet demand for grant expenditure. The allowance an authority receives for renovation and other specified capital grants in its housing investment programme is not a ceiling. The council can spend if it needs to by using its other resources. As an added safeguard against unforeseen demands for mandatory grants, we have again set aside a reserve of supplementary credit approvals—this time £30 million—for use in circumstances where an authority considers that its basic credit approval will be insufficient to meet demand for housing specified capital grant in any single year. Of course, as in the current year, any such application would have to be considered on its merits, and a particular consideration would be evidence that the level of mandatory grants actually approved by the authority was high in relation to the resources available. Authorities will again be invited to submit bids for SCAs during the course of 1992-93. Therefore, an authority such as Hyndburn, which has been through the process once before, should look to the coming year with confidence that, in addition to the allocation that has been made, it will have an opportunity to bid for additional resources if it appears that demand has heavily outstripped supply. I hope that my reassurance is of help to my hon. Friend.

In conclusion, I think it can be said that Hyndburn has come out of the 1992 housing investment programme round well, with a higher resource allocation than that for the current year. There remains scope in all authorities to improve the management of capital programmes and housing stock, introduce new management practices, work more closely with the local community and fully to engage the housing associations and private sector as a means of making resources go further and securing better value for money. Resources for housing are already very substantial but they are finite. Local authorities should temper their plans with realism. Increased efficiency rather than ever-growing allocations points the way forward; and the new system of competitive HIPs that we have introduced provides a basis for rewarding those authorities who most clearly demonstrate their effectiveness.

I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing the position in Hyndburn to the attention of the House this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 3) BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL

Order for Third Reading read.

Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified.

To be read the Third time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Co-operatives

1. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to expand the number of housing co-operatives and other tenant-led initiatives; and what funds he intends to make available to the Housing Corporation to assist these projects.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): The Department has increased its grants for the promotion of tenant-led initiatives on local authority estates by more than a third since last year. For the housing association sector, the Housing Corporation will shortly be issuing a comprehensive strategy paper on housing co-operatives and tenant participation. It is for the corporation to decide what funds to make available for those purposes from its promotional grants provision and growing capital programme.

Mr. Turner: The Minister will be aware that it is now two years since the Government produced their paper "Tenants in the Lead", which calls for significant progress to be made in the development of co-operative housing. Sadly, we have not seen much progress since receiving that publication. That led to the fact that today a new charter for housing co-operatives has been launched in the House of Commons—I know that the Minister is aware of that —which has received the full support of the all-party parliamentary group on housing co-operatives. Do the Government still believe in the development of housing co-operatives? If so, will the Minister meet a deputation from the Time For Action campaign to discuss the development of housing co-operatives?

Sir George Young: The short answer would be yes. As the hon. Gentleman knows, until recently I was the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on housing co-operatives, a vacancy which the hon. Gentleman now so ably and amply fills. I reaffirm the Government's commitment to the concept of "Tenants in the Lead". We remain deeply committed to the involvement of tenants in the management and, where appropriate, ownership of their homes. I should be happy to meet a deputation involving the hon. Gentleman and the all-party group. The Department is continuing to approve a growing number of tenant management organisations. We are increasing significantly the grant resources that are available for that project this year.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend's commitment to the housing co-operatives is well known. Indeed, as he said, he is a former chairman of the all-party group. What steps will his Department take to ensure that initiatives are not overcome or hidebound by unnecessary bureaucracy?

Sir George Young: If my hon. Friend comes across any unnecessary bureaucracy, I hope that he will be the first to bring it to the attention of Ministers. The Department is increasing the number of grants that we give to tenant management organisations. We are approving a significant number of estate management boards, whereby tenants will take over the responsibility for managing their estates. I understand that at its meeting yesterday the Housing Corporation reviewed its own strategy on co-operatives and that it is shortly to publish a paper outlining its future strategy.

Mr. George Howarth: The Minister and I have worked closely together on the subject of housing co-operatives, and I should like to share in the point that was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) about the Minister's commitment to that movement, which is well known and appreciated in the House and elsewhere. For the immediate future—while the Minister is still in office—we hope that his support will be translated into rather more tangible assets for the movement than hitherto. Evidence of the bureaucracy that now seems to be strangling the co-operative movement, to which the hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) referred, is now so overpowering that the Minister's commitment must be put to the test to resolve those problems.

Sir George Young: I am not sure that I accept the analysis that the process is hidebound by democracy. We need to distinguish between tenant management and tenant ownership co-operatives. Progress on ownership co-operatives has indeed been slow, for a number of reasons. Management co-operatives, however, have made extremely good progress. I envisage tenant management co-operatives as the first step towards tenant ownership co-operatives. I envisage a continuous process from consultation to management and thence to ownership, and I believe that an unstoppable momentum is building up.

Mr. Dunn: Are not the best tenant-led initiatives those that allow tenants a greater say in their own destinies, leading possibly to increased owner-occupation? Will my hon. Friend consider introducing the rents-to-mortgages scheme on a national scale?

Sir George Young: As my hon. Friend will know, two pilot schemes are now under way, in Milton Keynes and

Basildon. The initial analysis of those schemes is positive, and when the Government have completed that analysis we shall indeed consider extending the scheme nationwide.

Sheltered Housing

2. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent discussions his Department has had with local authorities and housing associations in relation to outstanding demand for sheltered housing.

Sir George Young: My Department has discussions with local authorities and the housing association movement throughout the year, covering a wide range of housing issues, including sheltered housing.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that there is still a widespread shortage of sheltered housing, especially affordable housing for elderly people to rent? Will he give greater priority to that provision, and also ensure that more emphasis is placed on the need for housing to be provided in areas that elderly people know, rather than several miles away at the other end of town? It is important for old people to continue to live in the areas that they know.

Sir George Young: In the past 12 years there has been an 86 per cent. increase in the provision of sheltered housing, which now accounts for some 2·5 per cent. of housing stock. It is true that, because of demographic change, we shall need to make appropriate housing provision for frail and elderly people, but I am not persuaded that sheltered housing is the only option: many people will prefer to remain in their own homes, where the necessary adaptations can be made and the necessary support can be given. To obtain more information on the subject, we have commissioned a study from Ernst and Young, which we hope to publish in July this year. That study will shed more light on the range, quality and quantity of accommodation that the elderly need.

Mr. David Nicholson: My hon. Friend will be aware of the shortage of sheltered housing and other forms of low-cost accommodation in my constituency and elsewhere in the southern counties. Although the housing association movement has made important and valuable progress, it still cannot meet all the demands. My hon. Friend may also know that, in my constituency and elsewhere, there is all-party support for a continuing role for efficient local authorities, working effectively with the private sector, in the building and refurbishment of low-cost housing. Will he consider the matter urgently?

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation continues to allocate a substantial share of its resources to sheltered housing: this year, about £130 million is being made available for that purpose. We envisage an enabling role for local authorities; certainly, it is their responsibility to ensure that there is adequate provision in their areas for elderly people in housing need. They may wish to discharge that responsibility in a number of ways—for instance, working with housing associations, using their planning powers and building under licence. It is up to them to use the totality of the resources at their disposal to meet the social challenge outlined by my hon. Friend.

Low-cost Housing

3. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of the new towns commission to discuss the release of land for low-cost housing.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): I have no plans for such a meeting.

Mr. Grocott: Is the Minister aware of a specific aspect of the housing problem in the Wrekin, which is well recognised by all concerned, including the council, the housing associations and the churches? Nearly all the housing land is owned by the new towns commission, which cannot release it at less than its full market value.

I urge the Minister to contact the commission's chairman and to impress on him the importance of making land available to meet the urgent housing needs of new householders and, in particular, elderly people. Will he give me an assurance that he will at least talk to the chairman, to ensure that affordable housing land will be supplied?

Mr. Yeo: I am glad to be able to tell the House that the new towns commission has already agreed in principle to release 5 hectares of land next year in Telford at less than market value which will facilitate the provision of 200 units of low-cost housing. The real issue with housing in Telford and elsewhere is the problem that millions of tenants and owner-occupiers would face as a result of the savage cuts in take-home pay that people of all income levels would suffer if the Labour party came to power. The swingeing increases in tax and national insurance—the central plank of the Opposition's programme—would force millions of households, who at present can afford to pay for their own housing and to stand on their own feet, into the humiliating dependence of subsidised accommodation. There would be an explosion in demand for low-cost housing that no amount of land released could possibly satisfy.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that Ministers will answer the questions today that are asked rather than the ones that are not asked.

Mr. Butcher: While the Minister is examining low-cost housing, may I refer him to a case with which he will be familiar: the attempt some years ago by my constituents to acquire low-cost housing in Marina and Pomeroy close, who are now caught in the legal crossfire between Coventry city council and my hon. Friend's regional officials. May I ask my hon. Friend to bang a few heads together and sort out this mess?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has been assiduous in drawing this matter to my attention. The Department will do everything possible to ensure that his constituents are properly looked after. I hope that the same level of co-operation and commitment is forthcoming from the council.

Environmental Projects (South Yorkshire)

4. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide funds to ensure that there is adequate support for necessary environmental projects in the South Yorkshire coalfield area.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): The Government are already making a major contribution to the area by providing substantial resources to clear away the dereliction, improve the environment and create the conditions for a strong and viable economy.

In the current financial year, we have provided Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham with more than £5 million from the Department's derelict land grant programme and over £1·5 million from the urban programme for environmental schemes. We have also awarded £14·9 million of city grant for three major development projects in the Dearne valley which will make significant contributions towards the improvement of the area.

Mr. Hardy: As the Minister knows, I have pressed for, and I greatly welcome, central support for the regeneration of this area. Is he aware that anxiety continues about that share of expenditure which is a local authority responsibility? Will he ensure that neither lack of RECHAR money nor excessive central pressure or excessive limitations on local spending will in any way imperil this desirable and necessary achievement?

Mr. Trippier: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he put that question. As he knows, I have specific responsibility for the Dearne valley. I am anxious to do whatever I can to help to regenerate the area—as I know he is. We have made a number of representations to Commissioner Millan on this subject, particularly with regard to the RECHAR programme. We cannot for the life of us understand why the money cannot be released under the present terms and conditions. Somebody has to say that, and I am saying it now. Discussions will continue between the Government and the European Commission on this specific item. I hope that we can find a way to solve the problem.

Mr. Batiste: Is not it clear that the problem with the RECHAR programme is that Commissioner Millan has unilaterally changed the rules on additionality and his interpretation of them and that he now proposes to act in a quite different way from the way in which all his predecessors have behaved? Is not it time that this matter was settled by agreement or referred to the European Court?

Mr. Trippier: It is for that precise reason that I chose to answer the substantive question in the way that I did. I believe that Commissioner Millan has changed the rules unilaterally. I resent that. It means that this money is not available. The terms and conditions that are attached to programmes such as this have been in existence for a long time. The fact that there are people in the Dearne valley who are frustrated by this change of direction by Commissioner Millan is a disgrace.

Mr. Allen McKay: In the case of the RECHAR programme, is not it a question of additionality? Although other countries have agreed with Bruce Millan on additionality, is not it a fact that this country's Treasury will not agree to it?

Mr. Trippier: The difficulty is that whether or not the issue of additionality is resolved in the near future does not alter the fact that the terms and conditions attached to such assistance from the European regional development fund or any other form of European support have existed for a long time. The local authorities in the Dearne valley have explained that they are frustrated because the money cannot be released. I am saying that it can be released if Commissioner Millan accepts and agrees to it.

Litter

5. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the working of the litter provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Trippier: The Government's litter legislation gives ordinary citizens the right to take action in the courts if public land is not kept clear of litter. Most local authorities and others under the new litter duty have responded well. But if they neglect the duties, local people can now do something about it.

Mr. Burns: Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Chelmsford borough council on fully embracing the powers given to it under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and urge other local authorities to follow its example? Is he aware that since appointing two litter wardens three months ago the council has apprehended 50 litter offenders and had six successful prosecutions against those dumping litter? Does my hon. Friend agree that that, combined with the council's educational programme, will ensure that the battle against the litter lout is waged effectively by Chelmsford borough council?

Mr. Trippier: I should like my hon. Friend to convey to Chelmsford borough council that I believe that it has set a fine example of what local authorities can and should do now that we have given them those powers. As hardly any of the measures catalogued by my hon. Friend cost money, I wish that some Labour councils would follow Tory Chelmsford's example and stop bellyaching about shortage of cash.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister recall that a few years ago the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), went to St. James's park with a bag and one of her Secretaries of State to pick up litter and had a great photo opportunity? When walking around London now, things are even worse. I have a suggestion: the right hon. Member for Finchley will finish work when the election is called; take her on permanently and let Lady Porter carry the bag.

Mr. Trippier: No one is more qualified to talk about rubbish than the hon. Gentleman. I ask him and the House to be patient and wait for a report which is to be published shortly by the Tidy Britain Group. It will show, in contrast to what the hon. Gentleman suggested, that London is a cleaner place as a result of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 .

Environment Business Forum

6. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has met representatives of the CBI to discuss the Environment Business Forum.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): I warmly welcome the Confederation of British Industry's decision to launch the Environment

Business Forum. I was pleased to participate in its launch at last November's CBI annual conference. It is in line with the concept of a "Green Club" which I floated in my Shell lecture at the Royal Society of Arts last May.

Mr. Taylor: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the initiatives that he has taken. Will he note that industry is getting its act together environmentally? Banks are increasingly questioning environmental liabilities when making lending assessments, insurance companies are making matters more difficult when assessing insurance risks if the environment is not taken into account and many companies are carrying out green audits. Will my right hon. Friend encourage industry's efforts to ensure that the environment is cleaned up?

Mr. Heseltine: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. That is why I am grateful to John Collins and his advisory committee which presides over examining options for industry and commerce to put to the Government to improve environmental performance. It is having a profound effect on the thinking of British companies.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Secretary of State agree that too many British inventions involving clean technology have been started in Britain but have been developed and manufactured abroad, to the extent that we now have to import eight times more than we export? Who does the Secretary of State blame for that? Does he blame British industry or does he accept the blame on behalf of the Government, who have done neither British industry nor the environment any favours by their failure to implement strict, clear and the best possible environmental standards?

Mr. Heseltine: No; the blame lies firmly and squarely with the Labour party, whose high-taxation policy starved the enterprise culture of the opportunity to invest. It nationalised large parts of our industrial economy and denied them the opportunity to compete effectively in the world economy.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that British industry is at the forefront of eco-auditing, to the extent that, under British standard 5750, Britain is the first country to introduce a voluntary system of eco-labelling for companies? Will he recommend to British industry the example of Pilkington, which already carries out eco-auditing on a departmental basis not only for environmental reasons but for reasons of efficiency and higher profit?

Mr. Heseltine: Pilkington is a first-class company, but the significance of the CBI initiative is that it is opening its club to companies that comprehensively observe environmental standards, which is a considerable step forward. My hon. Friend will know that the Government were at the forefront of pressing the Commission to introduce an European eco-labelling scheme. We were delighted that it was agreed at the last Council.

Homelessness (Leicester)

7. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement about homelessness in Leicester.

Mr. Yeo: The primary responsibility for dealing with homelessness in Leicester rests with Leicester city council.

Mr. Vaz: The Minister is aware that hundreds of families in Leicester are homeless. Does he agree that one way in which the council can help to alleviate their hardship, stress and suffering is to spend the money that it has received from the sale of council houses—a total of £10·4 million? Does he accept that that is one way in which the homelessness crisis, created by the Government's callous policy, will be solved?

Mr. Yeo: Maintaining restrictions on the freedom of local authorities to spend capital receipts allows the Government to increase the borrowing power of local authorities whose housing needs are greater. That is why Leicester council has been treated so extraordinarily well in its housing investment programme allocation for 1992-93, which has increased by 8 per cent. to almost £20 million. That is well above the average for the region and is in addition to another £11 million of housing association funds for its area next year and £5 million of estate action money to tackle the worst estates.

The Government are doing much for homeless people and tenants in Leicester. Unfortunately, Labour-controlled Leicester city council is not. It has one of the worst records in the country for collecting rent. At 31 December last year, it had £5 million of rent outstanding and 450 empty homes that could have been made available if it had managed its stock better. Its record is typical of Labour-controlled councils—inefficient and doctrinaire—and is a frightening warning of what the country would suffer if we had a Labour Government.

Planning Applications

8. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of planning applications this year have been accompanied by environmental assessments as required by EC directive 85/337.

Sir George Young: The environmental impact assessment directive applies to certain types of projects that are likely to have significant environmental effects. About 200 planning applications a year are subject to environmental assessment. This represents approximately one in 3,000 of all planning applications in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Colvin: Does my hon. Friend agree that, by agreeing the directive, the Government are not saying that the European Environment Commissioner can dictate planning decisions but formalising best planning practice, as the directive gives the public full information about the environmental impact of major projects and helps local planning authorities to determine what conditions to put on planning consents?

Sir George Young: I accept my hon. Friend's analysis. The Government are serious about their environmental stewardship. We are second to none in the thoroughness with which we consider major projects and have an excellent record on implementing European environmental measures. It would be wrong for anyone to suggest that that was not true.

Mr. Simon Hughes: When I asked the Attorney-General on Monday why the Government were not acting on Sunday trading—because they say that the European Community has not yet said whether Sunday trading is in breach of European law—and why they were not acting to

enforce the environmental impact assessment directive, even though the European Commission had said that certain transport schemes were in breach of European law, the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred me to the Secretary of State for the Environment. As the Secretary of State has just returned from a meeting with the Commissioner in Brussels, will the bulldozers be called off Twyford down and will the Government obey Brussels's interpretation of the law and ensure that we do not rip up our countryside in breach of a law that we signed?

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend had a friendly and constructive discussion with the Commissioner. The Government believe that these issues can be resolved without recourse to the European Court of Justice and that is our objective. In the meantime, we do not wish to be drawn into a public argument on the matter.

Mr. Marlow: Is my hon. Friend satisfied that the writ of Mr. Ripa di Meana runs in Italy as well as this country? If not, will he bring to the attention of the honourable gentleman—or whatever he cares to call himself—the principle of subsidiarity and tell him that we are far better able to organise our own environmental affairs than the Greeks, the Italians, the Spaniards, the French and the host of other European nations which he seems to leave alone?

Sir George Young: I understand that other countries have been prosecuted by the European Court of Justice more intensively than this country. As I said at the beginning, our record on environmental stewardship is among the best in Europe and I am convinced that it is higher than that of Italy.

Mr. O'Brien: Is it not a fact that the purpose of environmental assessments is to protect the standard of living and the quality of life of people affected by planning decisions? Therefore, is not it incumbent on the Government to ensure that environmental assessments are attached to planning applications, or are the Government reneging on the question of the quality of life being attached to planning applications, as they have reneged on so many other subjects?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman may know that the matter was discussed at some length during the Committee proceedings on the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. As he may also know, certain planning applications must be accompanied by environmental impact assessments and there is provision in the legislation to extend the categories that are so qualified if we so wish. I believe that at the moment the balance is right. The objective is to inform decision makers about the environmental impact of a planning application if they decide to go ahead. We achieved the right balance by insisting on such assessments where they are relevant but without encumbering the planning system by insisting on them in cases where they are not.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my hon. Friend for that fair and balanced answer. Does he agree that in a country—especially in the south—which is congested and which has a diminishing supply of undeveloped land the environmental impact assessments are very important? Now that the more hysterical newspaper articles attacking the respectable Commissioner, mainly because he was Italian, have subsided, will my hon. Friend confirm that the environmental impact assessments are extremely important to the Government and that the Government are fully committed to implementing them?

Sir George Young: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. I believe that we were doing much of what the Commission wants us to do before the directive came into affect.

Council Tax

9. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the planned introduction of the council tax; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): There has been widespread support for the introduction of the council tax on 1 April 1993, as we propose.

Mr. Welsh: It is difficult to believe the Minister. Is he aware that the Scots will be paying a surcharge on the council tax over and above their English equivalents and that young, first-time buyers in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen will end up paying more council tax than the Secretary of State for the Environment who is one of the wealthiest members of the Cabinet? Why does the Minister ignore the warnings of local council finance departments and professional organisations that the tax is a bureaucratic nightmare riddled with unfairnesses and that, like the poll tax, it is unworkable?

Mr. Portillo: The people of Scotland are paying a surcharge now on the community charge. It was announced today that Strathclyde's community charge is to rise by 35 per cent. because people have not paid. That is because the party that the hon. Gentleman represents urged them not to do so. When the people did not pay and had run up debts that they could ill afford the Scottish National party walked away, leaving them with accumulated debts and the law-abiding citizens to pick up the tab. The Scottish National party was not alone—some Scottish Members of Parliament from the Labour party were also involved, in particular the hon. Members for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray), for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), all of whom advocated non-payment. That is now being added to the bills of law-abiding people in Scotland.

Mr. Cran: Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity of the introduction of the council tax to reconsider the proposals of the borough of Beverley, supported by 25 to 30 other districts, concerning the unfair nature of the revenue grants system which will underpin the system of local taxation—indeed, it would underpin any system of local taxation? If he is not prepared to consider those proposals, why not?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend always speaks up well for the interests of his constituents and his local authority. I believe that there was a productive meeting with the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key). I continue to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) that it is appropriate that the way in which we distribute grants to districts should reflect the social conditions in each place. Certain services provided by districts—for example, those

involving environmental health, the administration of housing benefit and the supply of housing to the homeless —are more expensive to provide in areas of social deprivation, so we must measure differences in social deprivation between one place and another.

Mr. Gould: Does the Minister now regret his failure to abolish the 20 per cent. contribution rule, and his rejection of our offer to help get rid of the poll tax this year rather than letting it drag on until next year or the year after? Why has he failed to resolve the legal difficulties now confronting local authorities trying to collect what the Prime Minister described as the virtually uncollectable poll tax? Can it really be true that, on top of the £14 billion already down the drain, he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State are thinking of throwing yet more taxpayers' money at the poll tax problem? Does he not recall that the last time that this was tried the consumer faced a 2½p hike in VAT? Is that really what is in store for us again?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman's last suggestion is a product of the collective imagination of himself and *The Guardian*—so far as those two can be dissociated from one another; they seem almost synonymous. The Government have made it clear that if we need to legislate to put right the matter of computer evidence in magistrates courts, we shall do so. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is considering that now.

On the question of abolishing the community charge, it is the Labour party which has done what it can to delay the progress of the Bill through the House and the other place. All that it has offered us is a return to the rates, which would be extremely unwelcome in England as well as in Scotland, which is where the question arose. People who have to contribute 20 per cent. of their community charge are given more in their social security benefits than the contribution that they are asked to make. I believe that the time has now come to stand up for the law-abiding citizens —the people who pay their community charge. They have every right to expect that people receiving money in their social security benefits should use that money to pay their community charge, for which it is intended.

Mr. Squire: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on resisting any suggestion of a return to the rating system, which would penalise the one third of households in this country occupied by single adults? Whenever the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) repeats the figure of £14 billion, will my hon. Friend point out to him that a substantial chunk of that money is for rebates, which—unless we are to hear another revelation from the Labour party—a Labour Government—God forbid—would continue?

Mr. Portillo: The figure of £14 billion, as my hon. Friend does well to remind us, is very silly. First, it cannot be computed—one cannot make the figures add up to that sum. Even if one could, the money has been paid to people to help them pay their community charge; it has gone into local services. If the Labour party is saying that it would contribute less than that to local services, it must stand up and tell us so. My hon. Friend is right that to return to a rating system, as the Labour party wishes to do, and to say that large households full of wage earners should pay the same as a single widow is a disgraceful proposition. Only the Labour party—only a party that had learnt nothing in recent years—could possibly advocate it.

Chemical Emissions

10. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require the annual publication of details of chemical emissions into the environment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): As I explained in my answer to the hon. Member on 20 December, monitoring information about releases to the environment must be placed in public registers as soon as it is received or obtained, which in some cases will be at more frequent intervals than annually. In addition, for 1992 and future years, Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will be required to publish aggregate totals of releases from the data that it receives in respect of processes subject to integrated pollution control. My Department will issue a consultation paper on this proposal soon.

Mr. Alton: May I welcome the news that the Minister has just given? On Merseyside, there is considerable concern that following a recent chemical leak, 28 people had to receive hospital attention and treatment. Does the Minister agree that the American model, in which disclosures are forced by law and in which companies—some operating in this country—with plants there have to have far more stringent control means that the populations living in areas in which there are chemical factories are better protected? We should introduce such a model into our legislation.

Mr. Baldry: In this, as in every other area, we are making far more information widely available to the public. Information about chemical emissions is being made available by placing monitoring data in public registers. The public registers can be examined free of charge at all reasonable times, and copies of entries can be obtained on payment of reasonable charges. Dangerous occurrences involving the uncontrolled or accidental release of chemicals must be notified to the Health and Safety Commission. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in reference to the instance to which he referred, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Forth), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment, gave a detailed reply about the actions taken by the Health and Safety Executive on 20 December 1991.

Mr. Michael Brown: Does my hon. Friend accept that there need be no concern for the Government about the requirements to publish more detail about chemical emissions? Will he take it from me that in my constituency, where we have two oil refineries, two titanium dioxide manufacturers and, shortly, two electricity generating companies, the amount of emissions by those companies is being reduced all the time? The combined cycle gas power stations which will be built by National Power and PowerGen in my constituency will cut sulphur dioxide emissions and carbon dioxide emissions to the benefit of the environment in the whole country, as well as in my constituency.

Mr. Baldry: I am very happy to agree with my hon. Friend. He makes the point very well.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does the Minister agree that under the American model, there have been substantial reductions—90 per cent. in the case of one chemical company, Monsanto—in emissions, as a result of proposals such as those that Labour will introduce after this year's election? Does he agree that the publication of all the information available in the world is not of much use if a Government like his cannot implement legislation such as that relating to nitrates in drinking water?

Mr. Baldry: Let us get that into context. The case to which the hon. Gentleman refers is the first case brought against the United Kingdom on an environmental issue in the 20 years in which we have been a member of the Community. Many cases have been brought against other states, including cases against almost all other member states in relation to the drinking water directive. In three of the five counts in the court case, compliance has now been achieved. A fourth count relates to legislation in Northern Ireland and it has not delayed the action being taken there to achieve compliance with the directive's standards. On the fifth count, relating to nitrate levels in some parts of England, the United Kingdom is already doing everything practicable to achieve compliance at the earliest practicable date.

There is nothing wrong with the quality of drinking water in the United Kingdom. In the first annual report of the drinking water inspectorate, which was published last year, the chief inspector confirmed that in the 3·3 million tests made in 1990, 99 per cent. complied with the requirements of our national regulations which are more stringent than the European Community directive. That is a record of which we can all be proud.

European Regional Development Funds

11. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to alter the arrangements governing the payment of European regional development funds to local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: It is well known that there are differences between the Government and the European Commission concerning interpretation of the additionality requirement. The issue has been subject to extensive discussion. We shall, of course, make an announcement as soon as our differences with the Commission are resolved.

Mr. Hicks: I hope that that gives cause for encouragement. Is my right hon. Friend aware that in those regions which have been identified as in need of additional financial aid because of their social and economic requirements, there is considerable disappointment and, indeed, frustration about the fact that we cannot take up our full allocations? Is he aware, for example, that in Devon and Cornwall there is a shortfall of £17·5 million? In the Plymouth travel-to-work area we have been able to use only £3 million of the £11 million allocated under the RENAVAL programme because of the reduction in the work load of Devonport dockyard. May I impress upon my right hon. Friend the need for urgency to resolve the problem?

Mr. Heseltine: I fully understand the concern and care of my hon. Friend in representing his area. I hear what he says. Perhaps it is the Labour party which should bring pressure to bear upon a former Secretary of State for Scotland who is now denying this country the benefit of these funds.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Since European regional aid is supposed to be for additional public expenditure in the regions, why do the Conservative Government prevent regional aid going to local authorities throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman must know that very substantial increases in assistance have been provided through one Government programme or another to deal with the sort of issues that the matter covers. The Government have expressed the clear view that that has enabled additional funding to flow because we took into account the potential of the ERDF scheme. Anyone who has the slightest doubt about the force of these arguments should remember the eloquence with which they were expressed by Commissioner Millan when he was Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Andy Stewart: While Bruce Millan plays politics in Brussels, it is left to the British Government to give additional resources to coalfield areas. For example, in my constituency alone in the last financial year we received £0·5 million from British Coal Enterprise Ltd., £3 million in land reclamation grants and almost £1 million from the rural development programme. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those valuable resources will be available in the coming year?

Mr. Heseltine: No one has fought harder than my hon. Friend to bring resources to deserving areas. I do not think that we should deny Commissioner Millan the opportunity to play politics in Brussels. Certainly there will be no job for him in government in this country.

Poll Tax

12. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received to date about the timing of the abolition of the poll tax.

Mr. Portillo: We have received a number of such representations.

Mr. Canavan: Is not the Minister ashamed to be going into the general election campaign telling electors that they will have to suffer the poll tax for another year or more? Would not it be in the interests of all the people to abolish the poll tax immediately and to reimburse local authorities with additional Government grant as a temporary measure until a much fairer system of local government revenue raising is introduced after Labour wins the general election?

Mr. Portillo: Is not the hon. Gentleman ashamed that he told electors not to pay their community charge bills, and will he now pay the debts of those poor people who listened to his advice before he ran off and left them in the lurch?

Mr. David Shaw: Can my hon. Friend confirm that one benefit of the community charge has been the increased accountability to which it has held left-wing councillors? Will he confirm that after the abolition of the community charge, the new council tax will also increase the accountability of left-wing councillors?

Mr. Portillo: I believe that one reason why the community charge was so fiercely fought by the Opposition parties was precisely because it made clear the connection between spending decisions taken locally and the level of tax to be paid locally. Under the council tax as well there will be a direct relationship between what an authority spends and what it has to charge its people. That is an inescapable reality.

Mr. Blunkett: Can the Minister confirm that on the issue of taxation the greatest incompetence and the biggest waste of public money are inflicted on the people not by the Opposition but by the party that introduced the poll tax? Will he give an absolute assurance that there will be no last-minute gerrymander to prevent poll tax bills going out before the date of the general election?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), who have both raised this topic this afternoon, seem to be uncommonly rattled that the Government will do something to make our election victory even more certain. As I have said time and again, we have made clear the amounts of money available to local government next year. They are generous amounts and they are what the country can afford. If the hon. Gentleman wants to know about the waste of resources in local government, he has only to look at the Lambeths, the Haringeys, the Hackneys and the other councils that have become bywords for waste.

Derelict Land

13. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further proposals he has to reduce the extent of derelict or disused land in public ownership.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend is today laying before the House regulations requiring local authorities to maintain and publish registers of their unused and underused land. Other possible measures to reduce the extent of such land in public ownership are also being considered.

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that everyone—at least all Conservative Members—will welcome the news that registers of derelict and disused land are to be published for the first time. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very sad that nearly 12 years have elapsed since legislation on that issue was first put in place? Is not it about time that further measures deliberately to stimulate the disposal of that land were put to the House?

Sir George Young: As my hon. Friend will know, considerable progress has been made in addressing that problem over the past 12 years through derelict land grant, city grant and other measures. None the less, there are about 150,000 acres of vacant land in urban areas, about half of them publicly owned. For that reason, we are looking at what further measures are necessary to make faster progress.

Mr. Soley: I should start by congratulating the hon. Gentleman on being the only Minister who still answer questions in this decrepit old Government. Will he introduce a register, as he is doing in respect of other areas, of Government-owned land and property? I refer, for example, to the 24 houses in Nyland road, Swindon, which have been empty for up to 10 years and the 60 houses that have been empty in RAF Valley, Bryn Trewan estate, which are about to be sold off as a job lot, presumably to depress the housing market while we keep families in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. All those properties have been empty and unused, and all are owned by the Government. They are part of the 16 per cent. of the empty housing stock owned by the Government. We have no register, no action, bed-and-breakfast, cardboard city—what a record.

Sir George Young: If the hon. Gentleman really wants to do something about empty houses, perhaps he will address his political colleagues in Liverpool, for example, where one in 10 houses are vacant. Perhaps he will talk to his political colleagues in Manchester, Lambeth, Hackney and Southwark. That is where the bulk of the empty houses lie, and that is where he should use his energy to make progress.

Sir Anthony Durant: When my hon. Friend looks at structure plans, will he take account of empty land that is owned by nationalised industries, local government or any other local authority?

Sir George Young: As my hon. Friend will know, it is the purpose of a structure plan to identify appropriate land use for the totality of land in a certain area. We would certainly expect local authorities, be they counties or districts, to identify positive uses for derelict land and to bring it back into use before they come up with proposals to make any encroachment on green-field land or land in the green belt.

Water Payments

14. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made to offer water consumers a choice in how to pay for their water consumption.

Mr. Baldry: The Director General of Water Services is encouraging companies to improve customers' awareness of their right to opt for a meter at their own expense and to deal with difficulties such as the high cost of installation and the unattractive tariffs set by many water companies. The director general's policy on charging for water was set out in "Paying for Water, the way ahead", a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Madden: Is the Minister aware that many people, including families in Bradford, are terrified of their water bills as a result of having water meters fixed to their homes? Is he aware also that they are unable to pay their bills and are putting their health and hygiene at risk by unreasonably cutting their use of water? Will he instruct the water companies not to install water meters compulsorily? As a member of a party that proclaims its support for freedom of choice, will he arrange urgently for water consumers to have a real and genuine choice of how they pay for their water in future?

Mr. Baldry: Each company is responsible for deciding on its preferred system of charging, subject to the

overriding requirement that it does not give undue preference to or unduly discriminate against any class or group of customers. Metering is one obvious way of charging for water services and is the general method in other countries. It is potentially the fairest charging method as customers have some influence on their own bills.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does the Minister accept that the public would be more willing to pay by any means for their water supply if the Government would act speedily and effectively on the alarming report published this morning by the National Rivers Authority, which indicates clearly and precisely that agriculture is responsible for the biggest source of serious pollution incidents affecting public water supplies? Will he accept that the Department of the Environment has a special responsibility to protect the general public and the water supply against the huge and mighty pressures from agriculture which are always there?

Mr. Baldry: It is because we recognise those responsibilities, not only in relation to agriculture but generally, that privatisation has enabled the water companies to invest some £5,000 a minute, each and every minute between now and the end of the century, on enhancing water quality in this country.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that his response on compulsory imposition of metering is unacceptable to ordinary people? In Bradford many people object to the imposition of metering by Yorkshire Water, an organisation which puts private profit before public service. If the Government are really concerned about genuine choice and the citizens charter and all the other public relations paraphernalia, why do they not give citizens a choice and make it their right to have either metering or a general charge?

Mr. Baldry: Water is a facility for which it is right and proper that there should be a payment. Metering is one obvious way of charging for water services because it is generally the method used in other countries and it is a fair method because consumers are then paying only for the water that they use.

Repossessions

15. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his latest discussions with lending institutions concerning repossessions.

Mr. Heseltine: Last month, ministerial colleagues and I had a series of meetings with the Council of Mortgage Lenders to discuss the problem of mortgage arrears and repossessions. These resulted in agreement on the measures which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced to the House on 19 December. I spoke to Mark Boleat, the Director General of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, earlier today on my return from Brussels, and I expect the lending institutions to be in a position to make announcements within the next two to three weeks.

Mr. MacKay: I readily recognise that the agreement has been of great benefit to many home owners who, through no fault of their own, are in fear of repossession, but will my right hon. Friend agree that it is absolutely critical that Mr. Boleat, on behalf of the lenders, ensures that housing associations are provided with those funds quickly so that they can be seen to be taking over the houses that could have been repossessed and so completely put at rest the minds of those who still live in some fear?

Mr. Heseltine: We all sympathise with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay). He will have welcomed the assurance of the building societies that they will not act against those people who have borrowed money from them, albeit in arrears, who are making a reasonable contribution or whose contributions are covered by income support.

Mr. Gould: Was not the half-baked scheme announced before Christmas not only too little and too late but a classic case of passing the buck? Has the Secretary of State not just, in effect, confirmed that not a single agreement has yet been concluded under the scheme by any building society or housing association, so that not a single household has yet benefited in the way that was suggested by the hon. Member for Berkshire, East a moment ago? Is it not now clear that the whole sham was, typically, designed to deal with embarrassing headlines rather than with the real and pressing problems faced by thousands of families threatened with the loss of their homes?

Mr. Heseltine: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was obviously half asleep on Saturday when the Mortgage Corporation announced the first such scheme. The most important help to give to people in those circumstances flows from the fact that interest rates have been cut by 4½ per cent. since October so reducing the typical mortgage by an average of £70 a month. Anyone who is genuinely concerned about people having to pay their mortgages would be appalled by the Labour party's proposal to put tax rates up to 59p in the pound.

Acid Rain

16. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest assessment of the damage caused by acid rain to mountain streams in upland Britain and to trees across the country.

Mr. Trippier: There is clear evidence suggesting that the 40 per cent. reduction in the United Kingdom's sulphur emissions over the past 20 years is helping to bring about a decrease in acidification in some areas. The latest work on trees shows little evidence of widespread acid rain impact.

Mr. Williams: What does the Minister think of National Power's proposal to switch Pembroke power station to the use of orimulsion fuel? Does he recognise that that will result in a massive increase in sulphur emissions which will mean that Pembroke will be the single largest sulphur emitter in Britain and, as it is sited on the western coast, it is in line to produce the maximum environmental damage? If that proposal goes ahead, will he insist that it is accompanied by flue gas desulphurisation?

Mr. Trippier: To make it clear to the hon. Gentleman, the commitment that has been given to the House and to the country by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy in terms of meeting the large combustion plant directive, actually stands. The Government's commitment to cut emissions from large combustion plants from 1980 levels to 60 per cent. by the year 2003 and to cut NOx by 30 per cent. by 1998, is a target which will be met.

Colliery Closures

3.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announcement by British Coal of the loss of 13,000 jobs at the Prince of Wales, Sharlston, Kellingley and Whitemoor collieries and the closure of the topping cycle plant at Grimethorpe."

This matter is specific, because it follows the loss of 20,000 mining and support jobs in west Yorkshire since 1985 without any attempt by the Government to provide replacement industry and it includes the lack of RECHAR. It is important and urgent because the work force, with an average age of between 32 and 33, are being blackmailed by British Coal. If they do not accept voluntary redundancy by the end of March, they will lose £10,000.

Some of those men have been transferred from other collieries and promised long-term employment. They have been encouraged to purchase houses with high mortgages, and they are now desperate and worried. They have been portrayed as Europe and world beaters in coal production in recent months.

The Grimethorpe plant has played a leading part, with a lack of finances, for many years in producing clean coal technology. The closure of the plant is a retrograde step, as that technology is very much needed.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to grant my request to allow the House to consider this serious matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the effect on unemployment of the announcement by British Coal to further run down the coal industry in his own and in neighbouring constituencies."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the matter. As he knows, I have to decide whether his application comes within the Standing Order and, if so, whether a debate should be granted which would take precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow.

In this case, I regret that the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirement of the Standing Order. I therefore cannot submit his application to the House today.

Shops (Amendment) Bill

3.34 pm

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for certain descriptions of shops in England and Wales to be open for trade on Sunday, subject to their being registered with the local authority; to impose a general prohibition on the opening on Sunday of other shops, extending this prohibition to certain business premises which on week-days are open for the service of customers; to provide protection for persons employed in or for the purposes of a shop which is, or is to be, registered for Sunday opening, where they have conscientious or other objections to working on Sunday; to make consequential and other repeals in the Shops Act 1950; and for connected purposes.

Seldom has the time been more appropriate or the need more urgent for a Bill of this kind. You, Mr. Speaker—indeed, the whole House—will know that the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council and the Chief Rabbi drew the Prime Minister's attention to the pre-Christmas law-breaking, which they said

"will determine the institution of a nationally observed day in the week substantially set apart for activities which are other than commercial in nature. We believe that all peoples need to have one day in the week which is different, and which provides an opportunity for varied forms of community life and activity. Divine worship is an important but not the only concern here. The progressive abandonment of such a nationally observed day poses a real danger to family life and social relationships and especially to the welfare of many workers in the retail industry."

My Bill seeks to address these concerns, which are shared by millions, in a very constructive way and is entirely based on the Keep Sunday Special proposals on rest—meaning recreation, emergencies, social gatherings and travel. I place on record appreciation to David Blackmore and his staff for all their efforts in addressing these problems.

Early-day motion 291, which has been signed by 124 right hon. and hon. Members, illustrates the measure of cross-party support that these proposals have. The economic evidence of the failure of Sunday trading is summarised by the trade magazine Supermarketing, whose latest research shows little evidence that seven-day opening helped to increase overall grocery spending. Instead, market share has been stolen from law-abiding retailers and the smaller shops, many of which have lost and are losing up to 50 per cent. of weekly turnover. Small shops cannot survive for long under these conditions.

The House needs to take note of the fact that, in 1961, there were 147,000 grocery stores in Britain, whereas in 1990 there were just 44,700. Indeed, the trade paper of the independent stores—*Independent Grocer*—now gives the figure as 41,000. The market share of these stores dropped from more than 50 per cent. in 1961 to less than 12 per cent. last Christmas. On the other hand, the share of the five big superstores rose from 50 per cent. in 1961 to a massive 62 per cent. of this £44 billion sector of the retail industry.

Sunday trading is raising prices and reducing real freedom of choice. The consumer, especially the disadvantaged consumer, is the loser. Losers too are local residents, who have to contend with traffic, noise and litter and all the other types of disturbance. So are the food producers and the transport companies, who face the exercise of near-monopoly market power by over-dependence on the five big supermarket chains.

[Mr. Ray Powell]

The most telling evidence of all that Sunday trading is a costly mistake, for which the whole nation is paying a heavy price, is not the new year phoney price war by the supermarket chains but their savage attack on the living standards of the employees. I have a copy of a letter from the retail director of Sainsbury's confirming that all staff contracts will "have to be reviewed".

The letter continues:

"and details will be announced in late January of changes to be made effective from 15 March 1992."

I am given to understand that this will apply to Scotland also. There is no doubt that this will mean compulsory Sunday work for little or no premium payment. Such ruthless, unacceptable pressure, which closely follows that already applied by Woolworth's Gateway, Asda and others, is a callous and cruel deception upon thousands of vulnerable, low-paid, mainly part-time and largely female workers and their families.

I have been involved in the retail industry all my life. It is a people business or it is nothing. I have always found the staff honest, trustworthy, intensely loyal and hard-working, generally very tolerant of all extremes of consumer behaviour, and therefore the best asset and advertisement any business can have.

While I am proud to acknowledge my sponsorship by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers and my commitment of faith as a Methodist, I address the House today as merely one voice in a large and growing all-party coalition ranging from all the Churches to trade unions and consumer groups, all seeking a genuine consensus solution to the Sunday trading shambles.

Much of the shambles is of the Government's own making, because of their singular inability and unwillingness to enforce the law of the land or to show any real leadership in promoting reform. Instead, they have allowed a small group of directors of retail stores—Woolworth, Sainsbury, Tesco and the like—to dictate a fundamental change in our way of life for their own self-interest and to the benefit of fewer than 5 per cent. of the population.

It is remarkable that our Ministers have failed in their responsibilities, claiming that European Community law prevents them from acting. A fellow member state of the EC, France, is doing just that, however, against Mr. Richard Branson's Virgin plc megastore in Paris, and to the tune of a £100,000 fine. France has also publicly stated that this year it will introduce moderate reforms to its laws on Sunday trading.

It is abundantly clear that in that case it is the Government of France and the National Assembly—not Mr. Branson—who will decide, after consultation with various groups, on the timing and content of the reforms. There will be no waiting for any further decision from the European Court of Justice, which has already ruled three times that the Sunday trading laws of member states are not contrary to article 30 of the treaty of Rome. What an unworthy contrast the relative inactivity of the United Kingdom Government presents.

My Bill is based upon five principles—first, that the reasonable needs of consumers are met; secondly, that employees' rights and freedoms are fully protected and promoted; thirdly, that families and friends are able to spend quality time together; fourthly, that the freedoms of shopowners and local residents are safeguarded; and fifthly, that Sunday is actively promoted as a distinctive special day for rest, recreation and worship, as it is in the remainder of Europe.

My Bill would remove the anomalies and confusions of the 1950 Act. It would update and modernise the law by a type-of-shop approach, not by the use of lists or classes of goods. Local authorities would be asked to administer the scheme for a fee, which would make it self-funding, and with a simple system of registration. There would be a special provision in law for the smaller food and general convenience stores—the lifeblood of many neighbourhoods—to cater for the elderly, the infirm and those without cars who cannot take their custom very far. A clear mechanism of enforcement would be introduced, which would be fair and fully cost-effective.

When the House last debated Sunday trading on 13 December, the Minister of State, Home Office expressed her continuing openness to discussions. She said—I congratulate her on her perseverance:

"If the solutions of the hon. Member for Ogmore command great support, we will consider them with great interest."—[*Official Report*, 12 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 1210.]

I therefore remind the House that the proposals in my Bill have the unanimous support of all Churches and denominations in Britain, numerous local authority and local government associations, more than 150 large high street retailers—including more than 50 per cent. of the British Retailers Association—together with companies with household names such as C and A, the Co-op and Iceland. Other companies are broadly in sympathy with the type-of-shop approach in my Bill, including Marks and Spencer, the Sears group, House of Fraser, the John Lewis Partnership, the Burton group, and organisations representing some 10,000 convenience stores. Some 42 trade associations——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman please bring his remarks to a close? He has had 10 minutes.

Mr. Powell: We now have the chance to change the law. If the House approves my Bill, it will create an historic opportunity to reform the law, to redeem the authority of Parliament and to satisfy all who genuinely seek consensus change. It is practicable, enforceable, and acceptable to the country at large, and it commands a majority in Parliament. Above all, it meets the needs of a variety of interests and desires on a matter of conscience. This debate relates to the quality of life of millions of people. My Bill gives practical expression to values that are beyond price. I beg to ask leave to present it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 224, Noes 4.

Division No. 48] **[3.44 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Beith, A. J.
Adley, Robert	Bell, Stuart
Alison, Rt Hon Michael	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Allen, Graham	Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Alton, David	Benyon, W.
Anderson, Donald	Blunkett, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Boateng, Paul
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Ashton, Joe	Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Barron, Kevin	Burns, Simon
Battle, John	Burt, Alistair
Beckett, Margaret	Caborn, Richard
Beggs, Roy	Callaghan, Jim

Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Cleiland, David
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Day, Stephen
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Emery, Sir Peter
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hannam, Sir John
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hinchliffe, David
Hind, Kenneth
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keilett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Killoyle, Peter
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Latham, Michael
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Lord, Michael
Loyden, Eddie
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
Neillist, Dave
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shelton, Sir William
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stokes, Sir John
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Trimble, David
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Kirkwood, Archy
Mudd, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alun Michael and
Mr. Dennis Turner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Who will prepare and bring in the Bill?

Mr. Ray Powell: Mrs. Ann Winterton, Sir Bernard Braine, Sir Patrick Duffy, Mr. Patrick Cormack, Mr. Donald Anderson, Mr. Ivor Stanbrook, Mr. Alun Michael, Mr. Michael Alison, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. James Wallace, and myself, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that an hon. Member who voted against the Bill was included amongst the sponsors. In that case, his name will have to be withdrawn as a sponsor of the Bill.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ray Powell, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Sir Bernard Braine, Sir Patrick Duffy, Mr. Patrick Cormack, Mr. Donald Anderson, Mr. Ivor Stanbrook, Mr. Michael Alison, Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, and Mr. James Wallace.

SHOPS (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Ray Powell accordingly presented a Bill to provide for certain descriptions of shops in England and Wales to be open for trade on Sunday, subject to their being registered with the local authority; to impose a general prohibition on the opening on Sunday of other shops, extending this prohibition to certain business premises which on week-days are open for the service of customers; to provide protection for persons employed in or for the purposes of a shop which is, or is to be, registered for Sunday opening, where they have conscientious or other objections to working on Sunday; to make consequential and other repeals in the Shops Act 1950; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 February and to be printed. [Bill 56.]

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) has always intimated that, if a clear decision was reached over the question of Sunday trading, she would be prepared to take action. A clear decision has now been made. I therefore hope that you will

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

encourage both the right hon. Lady and the Attorney-General to come to the House and make statements to the effect that legal action will be taken against those people who are flouting the law on Sunday trading.

Mr. Speaker: In order that no one outside the House is misled about this matter, it is right that I should remind the whole House that the motion was one seeking leave to bring in a Bill.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If I heard you aright during the course of the presentation of his Bill by my hon. Friend the Member of Ogmore (Mr. Powell), you commented that, by voting against the Bill, a Member would be unable to continue as a sponsor. Obviously one accepts your ruling on that matter, as on all other matters. May I point out, however, that both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), who are vice-chairman and chairman respectively of the Co-operative group of Members of Parliament, acted as tellers in order to give the House the opportunity to test the wish of the House. I hope that the Government will have heard that voice clearly and loudly today.

Mr. Speaker: All I can say to the hon. Member is that, if he voted against the motion, he cannot then say that he is for it. *[Interruption.]* The whole House will draw its own conclusions.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you rightly said, what the House has decided today is simply to give leave for the Bill to be introduced. However, in view of the overwhelming majority in favour of the Bill—indeed, the complete absence of any significant opposition to it—and bearing in mind the fact that only about six or eight weeks of this Parliament are left, may I ask you whether discussions could take place that would enable the Government to introduce legislation, for which they now know that they have the overwhelming support of the House, so that the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) can become law as rapidly as possible?

Mr. Speaker: In view of what the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has just said, the case is somewhat weakened.

Autumn Statement

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer to move the motion, I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. In view of the late start and the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 6 o'clock and 8 o'clock. I hope that hon. Members who are called before or after that time will bear that limit in mind, so that every right hon. and hon. Member who wishes to participate may do so.

4 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 6th November 1991; notes that the Government has continued to maintain firm control over public expenditure, while honouring its commitments in full and increasing spending in priority areas; and congratulates the Government on its sound and prudent economic policies, which have led to a substantial reduction in inflation and have laid the foundations for sustainable recovery.

It is now a little over two months since I delivered my autumn statement to the House, and I welcome today's opportunity to debate the economic policies and prospects that I set out at that time. We also have the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee's informative report on the autumn statement, and I should start by paying tribute once again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) for his skilful chairmanship of that Committee.

In the autumn statement, I announced a programme of public spending which channels money to areas of long-term priority within an overall total for public expenditure that the country can afford. The Labour party offers instead an economic strategy that would raise spending indiscriminately and give the British people a bleak combination of higher inflation, higher interest rates and higher taxes.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I shall give way in a moment.

Today's debate is about the choice between the prudent long-term economic policies that we have put in place—policies that will lead to sustained and sustainable recovery—and the tax and spending policies of the Labour party, which would stop that recovery in its tracks.

Mr. Ewing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lamont: I shall give way in a moment. I first want to make a statement to the House.

I set out in the autumn statement the Government's view of the immediate prospects for the economy. As I have already acknowledged on several occasions, output in the second half of 1991 has turned out weaker than I anticipated then. The signs of recovery, apparent in sales and production figures as well as in confidence indicators in the late summer, were not sustained. That, of course, is disappointing but there remain good grounds for believing that the recovery will become firmly established in the course of 1992.

It has been said before, but it is worth emphasising again, that monetary policy operates with a time lag. The full effects of the reduction in interest rates from 15 per cent. to 10·5 per cent. have still to work through to businesses and individuals. The further mortgage rate cuts announced last week will mean that the monthly repayments on a £60,000 mortgage have fallen by nearly £200 a month from their peak. The temporary removal of stamp duty for house purchases under £250,000, and other measures that I announced in December, will provide a further welcome stimulus to the housing market.

Inflation has fallen dramatically over the last year, to a level clearly below the European Community average. Producer price inflation, excluding food, drink and tobacco, which is a good predictor of future retail price inflation, fell in December to 3·8 per cent. In the fourth quarter, the annualised rate was only 2·3 per cent., the lowest rate since 1973. That is excellent news. Low inflation makes British goods more competitive, and provides the stability and certainty that businesses and individuals need to save and invest.

Because inflation has fallen rapidly, the real incomes of those in work in this country are rising, unlike the position in the United States. There is no shortage of potential demand: indeed, there is considerable pent-up demand in the economy. There are always uncertainties about timing, but what is certain is that this rise in incomes will, in time, feed through to a rise in spending.

Fourthly, world stock markets, especially in the United States, are clearly anticipating economic recovery.

Fifthly, even in difficult circumstances, tens of thousands of people are still setting up their own businesses. The fact that so many new businesses are being set up shows that the entrepreneurial spirit that we nurtured in the 1980s still thrives. This reflects continued long-term optimism about the prospects for the British economy.

Finally, and perhaps most important, many manufacturers and retailers are responding in exactly the right way to weak demand by cutting prices and costs. Far from that being bad news, lower prices in the stores mean higher output and lower inflation. That is good news for consumers and for recovery, but recovery comes not, as the Labour party believes, from Governments trying to kick-start the economy but from businesses being more competitive.

Mr. Harry Ewing: I am grateful to the Chancellor for giving way so early in his speech, because my intervention may help to set the context in which his speech is delivered. When he has shown how wrong he was in his forecasts, backed up by all the paraphernalia of the civil service and the forecasting material at his disposal, why should the people of this country believe a word he says about the Labour party's spending proposals? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he now sounds very much like the Gerald Ratner of British politics?

Mr. Lamont: I am grateful to the hon. Member for inviting me to comment on and show why I am suspicious of the Labour party's spending proposals. I shall not disappoint him. I shall answer his question when I come to that.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Last year, we were told that recovery would come in the second part of 1991. On the Chancellor's own admission, that has not occurred. Is he telling the House that a recovery will take place in 1992, and why should the country believe him? Is that why the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Tory party chairman are so hesitant about holding an election on 9 April? Is it true that the Government are so terrified of facing the electorate that some Ministers want to wait as late as July?

Mr. Lamont: I have just spelt out—apparently, the hon. Gentleman was not listening—why I believe we shall see a recovery in 1992. That view accords with that of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which predicts that, in 1992, the British economy will grow by 2 per cent.—faster than Germany and as fast as France and Italy. Not only the Government but other organisations take an optimistic view of Britain's prospects in 1992.

I know very well that many businesses are continuing to face difficult conditions, but while the recovery has not yet become firmly established, it is clear that the foundations are in place.

The narrow definition of money—M0—has moved into the top half of its target range. Manufacturing investment —about which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is always talking—rose in the third quarter. Imports of raw materials are rising. The rate of increase of unemployment has fallen sharply. The increase in the last quarter of 1991 was little more than a third that of the first quarter.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Always look on the bright side.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman says, "Always look on the bright side", but unlike the hon. Gentleman, who has made it clear again and again that he has a vested interest in making the gloomiest and most dismal——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call the Chancellor.

Mr. Lamont: I give way to the hon. Member for The Wrekin.

Mr. Grocott: I am grateful to the temporary Chancellor for giving way. We are interested not in looking on the bright side or on the gloomy side but in looking at the truth.

Mr. Lamont: Sometimes that commodity is used more sparingly than on other occasions.—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already said that there is great pressure to participate in the debate, so let us now get on.

Mr. Lamont: The car industry has faced especially difficult conditions, but has shown remarkable resilience in switching production to export markets. Production for export in 1991 was up nearly a half on the previous year, and car production overall rose 12 per cent. in December. Commercial vehicle production which has faced similar problems has been switching from domestic to export markets, and export production is at its highest level since 1980.

Nothing could say more about the underlying strength of the British economy and the skills of British workers than Nissan's decision last week to invest another £200 million in its plant in Sunderland. That will make the

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Nissan plant the largest Japanese investment in Europe. It will bring another 600 jobs to the north-east with more to come through orders from suppliers. It is not only Japanese investors: yesterday's survey from the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce in the United Kingdom showed that Britain is the most favoured location for German investment in Europe.

All over the country, British exporters have continued to perform well. Our share of world trade in manufactured goods has risen for three years in a row, for the first time in decades. Our exports are at record levels. This achievement is all the more impressive given the weakness of economic growth throughout the industrialised world. The Opposition, we notice, have a deliberate policy of ignoring the rest of the world. They claim that recession here has nothing to do with what is happening in the United States or elsewhere. Of course that is nonsense. We have seen recession in many countries.

Last year, even Germany saw two quarters of falling gross domestic product—technically a recession. Growth has slowed in Japan and France. In the United States, the effects of the recession have lingered on despite the fall in interest rates to their lowest level in a quarter of a century. In addition to that in the United States, there have been recessions in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden and Switzerland.

I have always stressed that unemployment is likely to continue to rise for some time. I do not underestimate the hardship that that causes to individuals and families, but the right hon. Gentleman the leader of the Opposition seems to think that unemployment is an affliction peculiar to Britain. Unemployment is rising in most Community countries. Last month, unemployment rose by 30,000 in France and by 290,000 in the United States. In France, it is now over 2¾ million. In Australia, it is at the highest level since the war. Therefore, hon. Gentlemen cannot ignore the fact that these issues are common to many countries.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): At the Select Committee hearing on last year's Budget, the Chancellor told me in answer to a question that the main cause and origin of the recession was the Government's response to a too rapid rate of growth.

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman is not quoting me precisely. The point that I am making is that the reason that the outlook—*[Interruption.]* I am about to come to domestic factors. My point is—any person would have to admit this—that the international climate has undoubtedly been deteriorating. For an exporting country such as ours, that has a major impact on the economy.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): While we are on the subject of admissions, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, out of every seven jobs lost in the European Community last year, five were lost in Britain, under his Government?

Mr. Lamont: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the figure that he has given is gross. I have pointed out to him that unemployment has risen in a number of other European countries. The latest three-month on three-month figures on rises in unemployment show that, in the past three months, it has risen more quickly in several other countries than it has here.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: No, I should like to press on.

I know very well that times are difficult for business, but industrial production in Britain has fallen by less in the past year than industrial production in Canada, Italy, Belgium, Sweden or Australia.

Although the December fall in retail sales was disappointing, in this country sales were still higher in the last quarter than they were a year ago. Retail sales in Canada are down 10 per cent. on a year ago, and they are down in Italy, too. In the United States, the retail sales figures were the worst for 20 years.

It is pure folly to imagine, if one were ever tempted to do so, that we in Britain can isolate ourselves from the world economy. Economic conditions in other countries affect us directly, through the level of demand for British products abroad, but also indirectly through the effects on confidence. That in turn further affects domestic demand and output.

Of course, as the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) has said, domestic factors have also been at work. The most important of those is the sharp rise in the savings ratio in the course of the recession. Many individuals, having incurred large debts in the late 1980s, have chosen to repay those debts and, indeed, to build up their savings rather than to spend money on consumer goods.

In the short run, manufacturers and retailers have suffered as a result of weaker consumer demand. But it is not the business of Government to tell individuals that they should be spending rather than saving. In this country there has for a long while—quite rightly—been concern that our level of national savings has not been high enough. For too long, we have relied on house price inflation to do our saving for us. In the long run, an increase in real, genuine savings will help to finance investment, to reduce real interest rates and to strengthen the economy. That means that the recovery will be stronger and more soundly based.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Clearly, the Chancellor of the Exchequer genuinely believed that, by this time, consumers would be spending more money—that the pent-up demand of which he has spoken would have been released so as to start the economy moving again, and that that would lead the recovery. Why, does he think, have consumers not had the confidence to go into the shops and spend money? What does that reluctance say about Government policies?

Mr. Lamont: I have already said that one would not normally expect monetary policy to have had it full effect—for instance, the considerable loosening of policy that occurred between February and July last year. I am sure that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is not suggesting this, but it would be absurd to suggest that, because output does not follow a predicted path from one quarter to another, the thrust and direction of policy should be changed, or that policy is wrong.

Good management of the economy has nothing to do with changing policy in the futile pursuit of each month's passing statistic. Good management is about getting the policies right and sticking to them. That is what we have done, and that is what we will continue to do.

We must, of course, be realistic and open about this recession. It has caused much hardship. However, it is not

realistic to talk, as Opposition Members do, about a never-ending recession. It is positively irresponsible and shows that they will stoop to any depths to gain power and to try to frighten the British people. In the past few months, the Labour party has certainly succeeded in frightening the British people, but it is the Labour party of which the British people are frightened, because they know perfectly well that the one thing that could mean a never-ending free-fall recession is the advent of a Labour Government.

As this autumn statement has demonstrated once again, we are the only party that can keep public spending and taxation under control. Inevitably, the recession has added to the pressures both on public spending and on tax revenues. Weaker than expected activity in the second half of last year will mean that those pressures are even greater than anticipated in the autumn statement.

I shall present my Budget to this House on 10 March. The House would not expect me to anticipate my Budget, but I can tell the House that we will continue our prudent stewardship of public finances, in contrast to the reckless promises of the Labour party.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East likes to pretend that he has some alternative policy. For months, as we were lowering interest rates cautiously and carefully, he said they should be lower. Whatever the state of the economy, Labour's refrain has been the same —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down. This is a very important debate, and many right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate. Interruptions do not make it easier for them to do so.

Mr Lamont: Whatever the state of the economy, the right hon. and learned Gentleman's policy has always been the same. Whatever the level of interest rates, he has always argued that they should be lower. Even in 1987 and even in 1988, right at the top of the boom, the right hon. and learned Gentleman advocated that interest rates should be lower. We all know where we should be if we had followed his policy. Today, inflation would be higher and the recession would be deeper.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has been rumbled. Now he is trying to give the impression that he would not devalue the pound. He has been forced to admit that he could not cut interest rates. He has lost his only policy, so what does he call for now? He calls for a change of course—a new direction. He parrots the phrase. But what is this change of course—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This gives a very bad impression —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I mean the reaction of the House.

Mr. Lamont: We all know that the last thing the Labour party wants is for any attention to be focused on its policies. That is the one thing that it cannot bear.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has repeatedly in debate called for a fresh approach, a new policy and a change of course, yet in speech after speech we have not had the slightest sign or demonstration of what that policy is meant to be.

In the previous debate on the autumn statement, I asked the right hon. and learned Gentleman this question: if he did not disagree with monetary policy, what did he think about fiscal policy, about spending and about borrowing? I asked him then if he thought that public spending was too high, too low or just about right. I asked him whether he thought that borrowing was too high, too low or just about right, and he did not answer. What the right hon. and learned Gentleman lacks in frankness he makes up for in evasion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Chancellor admit that, this time last year, he forecast that there would not be a budget deficit? We are now running into the possibility in 1992 of a deficit of the order of £19 billion. On top of that, when the Government came to power in 1979, personal debt on average was 45 per cent. The latest figure is 102 per cent. That figure will haunt the Government for ever.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Lamont: The House will have noticed the cheers that the hon. Gentleman was getting from his Back-Bench colleagues. Perhaps that is because he is one of 25 hon. Members who signed an amendment to the motion, rejecting the market economy, calling for a fully socialist policy and disagreeing totally with the policy advocated by the Front Bench of his party.

Mr. Skinner: Answer.

Mr. Lamont: I will answer. For all his austerity, the hon. Gentleman has quite a few contacts with the City, but he does not seem to be well informed. No such prediction was made in the Budget last year. The hon. Gentleman has got it totally wrong.

To return to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, he is caught between the massive spending plans of his shadow Ministers and his wish to appear to be in a position to deny that a Labour Government would put up taxes, but he does not seem to be having much success with his colleagues.

Let me turn now in detail to public spending, the subject of the debate. On the programme for each Department, we have set out our spending plans for the next three years. On each of those, Labour promises to spend more. I hope that today the right hon. and learned Gentleman will tell us which of Labour's promises we should believe and which are just empty words.

Let me start with social security. In the autumn statement, I announced that provision for social security in 1992-93 would rise by £4·25 billion, to over £70 billion. That is a massive sum and a massive increase. We have honoured our commitments to the old, the disabled and the jobless. We gave extra help to the poorest disabled pensioners and those over 80. Unlike the Labour party, we did not use an economic downturn as an excuse to break our promises to pensioners.

But all that is not enough for the Labour party. Indeed, on 30 September last year the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

> "And of course that Labour Government will restore the link between retirement pensions and earnings and prices—whichever is the higher."

I noticed the right hon. and learned Gentleman nodding to confirm that. So much for the pledge that Labour has got only two specific pledges in its spending plans. We can see that not just the party but the right hon. and learned Gentleman himself does not believe in his policy.

The autumn statement demonstrated again that the national health service gets a better deal under this

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Government than it ever did under Labour. I announced an increase of £1·5 billion in United Kingdom spending on the NHS; for the hospital and community health services, the real increase in spending planned between this year and next is 5 per cent.

In 1992-93, we will be spending a greater share of national income on the health service than ever before—more than half as much again in real terms as in 1979. That has given more doctors, more dentists, more nurses, more midwives and more patients being treated. In addition, we are investing for the future of the health service because capital spending is three quarters as high as it was under the Labour Government.

All that is not enough for the Labour party. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was reported on one occasion as saying that he would pour money into the health service. On 23 September last year, he said:

"We are going to restore the underfunding of the NHS."

On 21 October, he said:

"in the first year we shall start to tackle underfunding".—[*Official Report*, 21 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 673.]

How much would he spend—£3 billion, £1 billion, or nothing? Is it a pledge—it sounds like a pledge—or is it just empty words?

Despite the recession, we have maintained British Rail and London Regional Transport's massive investment programmes. I announced an increase of £1·4 billion in Government finance, enabling them to maintain an investment programme of more than £2½ billion in 1992-93—three times as much as in 1979. Over the next three years, they will be investing half as much again in real terms as in the past three years.

But again that is not enough for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). On 22 April 1991, he said:

"the Government have the overriding responsibility to see that there is a high-speed rail link from the tunnel not only to London but to areas beyond—the midlands, the north, Wales and Scotland?"—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 760.]

He said nothing about having only two pledges on child benefit and taxes and about everything being optional. Are we to take those words at face value or not? Are those words a pledge? They sound like a pledge. Are they a pledge, or are they just empty words designed to deceive the electorate?

Opposition Members go on and on about education and training, but when will they look at the facts? Next year, we are providing for a real-terms increase of 15 per cent. in Government support for maintained schools. We have more students in higher education than ever before—one in four, compared with one in eight when the Labour party was in power. Again, it is not enough for the Labour party, and it is not enough for the Leader of the Opposition. In October 1991, he said:

"If that level of expenditure"—

he was talking about the proportion of GDP spent on education in 1979—

"had been maintained, an extra £2·6 billion every year would be going into education. We will continue with the scale of commitment at least at the levels of 1979."

Again there was nothing about having only two pledges. Is that a pledge, is it a firm promise—it sounds like it; it is calculated to be like it—or is it just empty words?

We announced that the overseas aid budget would increase by 2 per cent. in real terms. Again, that is not enough for the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). He was not worried about things being phased in over the next Parliament or over two Parliaments. On 3 October 1991, he said:

"During our first Parliament we shall increase Britain's aid budget to the United Nations' target of 0·7 per cent. . . . That is a firm commitment, costed and clear, that I pledge our Labour Government will carry out."

Again, that sounds like a pledge, but the Labour party says that it has only two pledges. Is it a pledge, or is it just empty words?

Yesterday, my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary showed that the bill for Labour's spending plans has now risen to an astonishing £37 billion over and above the public—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Barracking does not improve the quality of our debates.

Mr. Lamont: We all know that the Labour party simply cannot take any examination of its policy—it simply cannot. The Labour party has made—I quoted them today and there has been no intervention by Opposition Front-Bench Members—what sound like specific promises. Those promises add up to £37 billion. We have repeatedly challenged Labour Members either to drop those spending pledges or to tell the country what taxes they would put up to pay for them, but they have not responded.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Chancellor aware that, because of unemployment, each day 3 million working days are lost from production, and that the cost of benefit and lost production put together is probably about £50 billion a year?

Any proposal to expand production will be self-financing. *[Interruption.]* Of course it will. That is exactly how the rearmament programme before the war brought full employment back to Britain, after a slump under Neville Chamberlain as serious as the one that the Chancellor has engineered in this country.

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) in recent debates has made some telling contributions, but I am afraid that that is not one of them. It is a sheer fallacy to think that any public expenditure measure can be justified simply because it would create jobs and be self-financing. We have heard that many times before, but I am afraid that it does not work like that.

Hon. Members opposite have refused repeatedly to respond; perhaps we shall hear from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East something about this today.

These plans have huge implications for taxation as well, although the Labour party has been a little more forthcoming than at first about its tax plans. It promised to raise the marginal rate of tax for the better-off to 59 per cent. I am not sure what it thinks that will do to house prices in the south-east, about which we will no doubt hear so much from the right hon. and learned Gentleman in a minute.

Labour Members promised to hit everybody earning more than £390 a week with a full extra 9 per cent. on national insurance contributions. That will hit not just those earning more than £20,000 a year but anybody

whose earnings go over £390 in a week, perhaps because of overtime: they will be penalised by the tax proposed by the Labour party.

Despite their professed concern for investment, Labour Members promise to introduce a new 9 per cent. tax on savings income. They still call income from savings "unearned income", and they are determined to tax it as heavily as possible. The whole country knows, and we know, that the Labour party is the party of high taxation.

We saw in *The Sunday Times*—a quality newspaper that I read very carefully—an Access opinion poll which revealed that 57 per cent. of hon. Members on the Benches opposite want to put the basic rate of tax up by 2p. We also heard the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) admit in a broadcast the other day that he did not think that 83 per cent. was a penal rate of tax. Both those things reveal the attitudes of the party opposite.

We thought that we knew what Labour was promising on taxes, but now all seems to be in confusion after the Leader of the Opposition's famous dinner at Luigi's. I do not know if it was the effect of the frascati, but the right hon. Gentleman seems to have been in expansive mood. The dinner certainly cost a lot. It has cost Labour its last slender vestige of credibility on taxation. The truth is that Labour knows that it will have to increase tax and national insurance to pay for its extra spending. Even if it was able to phase in the increases, the phasing in would make no difference. In the end, the taxes would go up—and everyone knows it.

We were told by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East that all this was going to happen, and happen immediately. Now we are told that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is furious with his leader—again according to that reliable paper, *The Sunday Times*. I am not surprised about the right hon. and learned Gentleman, because his credibility has rested on creating the impression that they had only two spending plans and that those plans could be financed simply out of the increases in national insurance and the higher rates of tax.

The priority package of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is in ribbons, and not just because the Leader of the Opposition wants to delay the tax increases to pay for it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman himself has also bungled it, because, on top of the two specific pledges which he keeps saying are their only ones, he has added £1 billion for training as an immediate package for industry. So the right hon. and learned Gentleman simply cannot say that they can finance their child benefit and pension increases and the industry package out the tax measures that they are proposing and at the same time postpone the introduction of those tax increases.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Perhaps the Chancellor will refresh my memory. I do not know whether it was in *The Sunday Times*, but he claims that his credibility is much greater than mine. Why is that not reflected in the opinion polls that appear in newspapers?

Mr. Lamont: Powerful and persuasive though the right hon. and learned Gentleman is, he does not seem to have been very successful, because polls show that eight out 10 people think that a Labour Government would put up taxes.

Mr. Smith: If the Chancellor has such an outstanding economic record, and if I am so incredible, can he explain why he is so badly regarded by the public in every opinion poll?

Mr. Lamont: I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman puts that question to his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition all the time. The right hon. and learned Gentleman used the phrase "credibility gap". The Labour party does not have a credibility gap: it has a credibility chasm.

I hope that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East will answer some questions today. Where is the money coming from? What is the order of priorities? How does Labour plan to build up the supply side? How would Labour cope with a flood of public sector wage claims? How serious is Labour on inflation? Those questions, which some hon. Members may recognise, are very good questions, not because they come from me; they were raised by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) in a slim volume that was wistfully entitled, "Awkward Questions: Random Thoughts."

The hon. Member wrote that two years ago, but the Labour party has still provided no answers. Labour does not have an alternative policy; it simply has alternative presentation. Behind the lawyer's patter of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, he knows that he is defending a guilty party that is misleading the country. We know it, Labour knows it and, increasingly, the whole country knows it as well.

In the autumn statement, I announced a programme of public spending which the country can afford, designed to meet the needs of those areas that we see as the highest priority. I set out the economic policies that we have put in place that will provide the ground for a sustained, non-inflationary recovery—a real recovery, not the kind of sham recovery that we saw in the 1960s.

Some people say that there is not much difference between the policies of the two parties. However, some people are wrong. There is a vast divide between us and the Labour party on economic questions, in particular on taxation and public spending. We await the answers from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East today. There is no doubt that he would increase spending rashly, indiscriminately and unaffordably, inevitably leading to the higher taxes that Labour Governments always introduce—higher taxes, higher interest rates and higher borrowing. All that would stop the recovery in its tracks.

We commend our spending proposals to the House with the confidence that they are realistic, affordable and clear. No such description can be applied to the spending explosion foolishly promised by the Labour party. That is why the House should endorse our plans and reject the amendment.

4.44 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"declines to approve the Autumn Statement; deplores the continued mismanagement of the economy, which has plunged all parts of the nation into a deep and damaging recession, causing unprecedented and avoidable levels of business failures and rapidly rising unemployment; regrets the errors that are already apparent in the Government's

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forecasts for the economy made in the Autumn Statement; condemns the failure of the Government to invest in the economic infrastructure and vital public services; and calls upon the Government to promote an investment-led recovery including financial incentives for investment in manufacturing, tax credits for the enhancement of technology, assistance for regional economic development and a major programme of education and training to tackle Britain's continuing skills crisis.'."

As today's debate proceeds, it might be necessary to remind ourselves continually that it is about the autumn statement which was produced by the Government last November. That statement did two things: it provided the Government's assessment of the economic prospects for 1992, and it outlined the Government's spending plans for the forthcoming year. We have already heard the Chancellor attempt to divert attention from the Government's economic record and their totally inaccurate forecasts. No doubt that tactic will be pursued relentlessly today and in the period ahead.

Conservatives want political debate in this country to feature on almost everything except their economic record. One can of course understand their motivation for that, particularly with regard to the autumn statement.

Let me remind the House of the forecasts that the Chancellor made in his autumn statement in November. He told the House that he expected GDP to rise by 0·75 per cent. in the second half of 1991. He said that growth in 1992 would rise by 2·25 per cent. He said:

"The increase in output from the second half of this year"—

that is to say, 1991——

"to the second half of the next is expected to be 2¼ per cent."

—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 453.]

He claimed that growth from July 1991 to the end of June 1992 would be approaching 3 per cent. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] He did. There can be no question about it. The Chancellor said that very clearly on 6 November and I have quoted his exact words from *Hansard*. It is absurd to claim that growth would be nearly 3 per cent. between July 1991 and June 1992. It is right that that should be exposed today.

We are now in January 1992, more than halfway through that projected year. Where is the 3 per cent. growth? We are still declining and not expanding. It is now abundantly clear that all those forecasts, particularly the last one to which I referred, were rubbish.

In the light of the undisputed facts about the British economy, in particular the absense of growth in an economy which, in 1991 shrank by 2 per cent., it is astonishing that the Chancellor claimed on 6 November, when the forecasts were produced, that he was "realistic and cautious".

We all know what he was doing when he spoke to the House last November. He was doing one simple political task: he was creating a mythical economic scenario for a November election. That is what he was up to when he gave the House those figures.

Unfortunately for the Chancellor's reputation as an economic forecaster, the Prime Minister let him down by not having a November election because he ran away from the prospect of facing the electorate. We are now in January 1992, more than halfway through the economic year in which 3 per cent. growth was predicted. As we know, the economy is stagnant. At the very best, we are bumping along the bottom.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I am an admirer of the right hon. and learned Gentleman. We share certain objectives. He would like to see manufacturing industry expand and succeed to promote growth in the economy. How would the right hon. and learned Gentleman achieve that if, at the same time, he seeks to introduce swingeing tax increases on managers and entrepreneurs and also introduce a tax on savings? How will he achieve investment in manufacturing industry on that basis?

Mr. Smith: May I ask the hon. Gentleman for a small favour? I should like him to keep his professed admiration for me to himself for some time. In the forthcoming election I could do without it.

The hon. Gentleman said that if I were Chancellor I would introduce swingeing tax increases. Let him reflect that under Labour the top rate of tax—even adding tax and national insurance together—would be lower than the rate that was in force until March 1988 under a Conservative Government.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I am tempted to give way again, but if I were to do so I might encourage the admiration that I wish to stop.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has referred to the rate of direct taxes that applied in 1988. Presumably he is familiar with the Laffer curve. Is not it true that since the direct tax reductions of 1988 there has been a substantial increase in the tax take? In contrast, when his party was in government higher direct taxes produced a lower tax take. What on earth can he say to the British people to make them believe that what happened under the last Labour Government and what has happened under the present Government during the last two or three years would miraculously be reversed?

Mr. Smith: Let me make it quite clear that I have never accepted any economic propositions to the effect that if one constantly reduces tax rates one will constantly increase tax revenue. That seems to me to be an inherently absurd proposition. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members must allow me to reply to the question. The reason for the higher-tax band figures is that well-paid people have received huge salary increases. We know perfectly well that the Government invited the late Professor Charles Brown to investigate the connection between tax and incentives. Professor Brown, whose investigation was financed by the Treasury, came to the conclusion that there was no reliable connection between the two things. With respect to the hon. Gentleman, I say that the professor probably knew a little more about this than he does.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman say exactly how he would fund the increases in pensions and child benefit that he has promised—not to mention the rest of the £37 billion—if he were to phase in his tax bombshell?

Mr. Smith: I shall come to that matter. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that we have proposed tax changes that would more than cover our promises in respect of pensions and child benefit.

I must get back to the autumn statement. I am quite happy to answer hon. Members' questions——

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman as he seems to be hailing me.

Mr. Nicholls: If right hon. and learned Gentleman were to be so generous on future occasions I should hail him more often.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman denied that his party would introduce swingeing tax increases. Is not he aware that Labour's stated intention to tax savings income in excess of £3,000 would hit 750,000 people who are basic-rate taxpayers? In those circumstances, how on earth can the leader of his party say that his tax proposals will not affect people earning less than £20,000 a year?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman does not seem to realise that the purpose of our changes is to treat unearned income and earned income in exactly the same way. That is a first-class principle that should apply to all tax systems.

I really must get back to the autumn statement. The Chancellor, in introducing that statement, sought to justify his claims, which I believe were ridiculous. He sought to rebut my challenge that his forecasts were incredible by saying:

"What the right hon. and learned Gentleman ignored was the fact that our forecasts are in line with those of independent organisations".—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 456.]

Let us look at what independent forecasters are saying. In *Consensus Forecasts* of 1992, which usefully brings together the data from 34 different independent British forecasting organisations, growth for the whole of 1992 is predicted to be 1·4 per cent. So let there be no doubt that the autumn statement's assessment of the British economy is so absurd that it should be withdrawn and fed into the Treasury shredder—an over-worked machine that is well used to pulping reams of bogus forecasts made by the present incompetent Government.

Anticipating the inevitable downgrading of his estimates, which he had to make today and will have to make in his Budget statement on 10 March, the Chancellor took the opportunity of an early-morning slot on TV-am to begin the process of his tortuous recantation. The risk, of course, was that he would appear to be a dismal Johnnie —"dismal Johnnie" being a phrase which appeared in the press release of the Prime Minister's recent speech to Newcastle business men but which, on delivery, was changed to "moaning Jimmy". The Chancellor had little choice but to accept what the nation knew only too well and to admit to David Frost

"The forecast I made at the time of the autumn statement will prove to have been somewhat over-optimistic."

Hard on the heels of the Chancellor, the Prime Minister himself appeared on TV-am last Sunday and conceded that the recovery that he said he had previously imagined had been delayed. Note the revealing choice of words: "imagined" and "delayed". The Prime Minister appeared to forget his own admonition against moaning Jimmys when, as a dismal Johnnie, he sought to downgrade the economic prospects for the world as a whole using the well-tried Conservative technique of blaming others. But we now know that the point at which a moaning Jimmy becomes a dismal Johnnie is when the Prime Minister appears on TV-am and admits that the recession will not be over before the general election.

Despite the necessary backtracking in which both the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have been engaged, they have still not given up the addiction to producing bogus predictions about the British economy. Let us take the Prime Minister's most audacious effort to date. It occurred in that TV-am interview and was repeated yesterday in the House. In the interview he claimed:

"We are at a different stage in the cycle from many of our competitor countries, and I think we will come out of our difficulties earlier than them."

So that there may be no misunderstanding, let me quote the words that he used in the House yesterday at Prime Minister's Question Time:

"a number of European economies have either been in recession or are moving towards recession at precisely the moment when the United Kingdom economy is poised to come out of recession.—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 177.]

The Prime Minister's latest dodge is clearly to imply that as Britain was first into the recession it will be first out. But let us look at the latest available independent forecasts prepared by *Consensus Forecasts*, using 180 international forecasting institutions. These show that in 1992 Britain remains at the bottom of the G7 growth league. They even show that in 1993 we shall be at the bottom. The forecasts also confirm that the only other G7 countries to suffer a downturn in 1991 were Canada and the United States of America, which experienced declines of 1 per cent. and 0·5 per cent. respectively. This compares with Britain's decline of over 2 per cent.—more than twice as severe. Both of these countries are forecast to recover faster and earlier than the United Kingdom.

Let us look at the European Community, to which the Prime Minister referred yesterday. No single EC member, other than Britain, suffered a decline in gross domestic product in 1991, and the conclusion of the 180 forecasters is that in both 1992 and 1993 the only EC country with a worse projected growth rate than Britain is Greece. There never was, and there does not exist, any basis whatsoever for the Prime Minister's absurd proposition. The truth, as the objective facts reveal, is that Britain, first into recession under the Conservatives, would, under the Conservatives, be last out.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is commenting on a forecast. It is astonishing that, even though he has it in front of him, he cannot read it accurately. When he looks at what he said, he may well find that it was a great deal of nonsense.

Mr. Smith: What was?

Mr. Lamont: What the right hon. and learned Gentleman alleged the forecast to be. Leaving that on one side, the figure that he forecast to June was not, in fact, to June but to December. He got it wrong; he never knows the details.

As I said earlier, what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said does not accord with the forecasts of the OECD, and neither does it accord with the views of the European Commission. In its latest European economy report, published in December, it states:

"The United Kingdom is the only country where signals of sustained economic recovery are discernible. By contrast, the tendency for a gradual slackening of growth continued in six countries—Germany, Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal."

That accords fully with what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said.

Mr. Smith: I could make the obvious point that, as all of the hon. Gentleman's previous forecasts were wrong, there is no need to believe this one. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that he said that, from the middle of one year to the middle of the next, the figure would be 2¾ per cent. If he did not say that, what was his prediction from the middle of that year to the middle of the next?

Mr. Norman Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is quoting the figure for the second half of this year on the second half of last year.

Mr. Smith: I shall give way again to the right hon. Gentleman if he will tell me what was his prediction from July 1991 to July 1992.

Mr. Lamont *indicated dissent.*

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Lamont: It is all very well for hon. Members to shout, but they do not have the slightest understanding of these matters. The simple fact is that the forecast was expressed in terms of the second half of this year on the second half of last year. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has misquoted it, which must cast considerable doubt on almost everything else that he says.

Mr. Smith: We will look at the record and establish the facts. However, the right hon. Gentleman still has not told me what his forecast was from July 1991 to July 1992. I will give way again if he will tell me that. In the absence of a frank reply from the right hon. Gentleman, I shall move on —*[Interruption.]* I was not quoting what the right hon. Gentleman said in his statement, but what he said in the House.

It is not just in economic forecasts that we find the truth that belies Conservative propaganda, it is in the reality of our present economic experience; what is experienced every day by people in business. Unemployment in December rose yet again by 31,000, bringing total unemployment—on the Government's reckoning—to 2·54 million, a rise of more than 800,000 in the last year alone. Output is down once again, and home repossessions are occurring at the rate of 300 for every working day. In the last quarter of 1991, 995 business failures were occurring every week.

In case the Conservative party says that all that will come to an end, Mr. Philip Mellor of Dun and Bradstreet gave us the chilling news, in the *Financial Times* on 30 December, that

> "The really worrying message . . . is that . . . well established companies as well as new ones are going to the wall."

He said that the position was getting worse. It is little wonder, therefore, that business confidence has slumped again, as reported by the Institute of Directors, the CBI, Dun and Bradstreet and *The Engineer* magazine, which reported on the serious problems of Britain's engineering companies.

One of the major reasons why there is so little confidence is that no one can have confidence in a Government who, year in and year out—and even from month to month—get it so badly wrong. The Chancellor has what might be called the opposite of the Midas touch. Every area of the economy in which he predicts a recovery goes in the opposite direction.

In the middle of last year, yet again on his favourite appearance venue of TV-am, he detected the now notorious vague stirrings of recovery in the housing market. As millions of home owners and the construction industry know only too well, that sector of the economy remains severely depressed. Indeed, as the industry's leaders tell us, it is in its worst condition for decades. According to the chairman of the Building Employers Federation—a gentleman who happens to be called Mr. John Smith, who is no relation but is clearly a reliable source—said in the *Financial Times* on 4 January:

> "Construction output last year fell by between 8 and 10 per cent. and a further fall of at least 4 to 5 per cent. is likely this year."

So much for the vague stirrings of recovery in the economy.

Moving on from construction, the Chancellor applied his non-golden touch to the high street when he detected green shoots of recovery in time for the Tory conference. He then told his Guildhall audience that things were on the mend because retail sales were on an upward trend. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that there were exchanges between us in the House about that assertion. He is as aware as I am of the latest information that retail sales volume in December fell by a seasonally adjusted 1 per cent. compared with the previous month, giving a 0·4 per cent. year-on-year decline——

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport) *rose——*

Mr. Smith: I want to finish this passage. I am explaining how the Chancellor has a non-Midas touch.

The right hon. Gentleman said on 6 November, during our debate on the autumn statement:

> "The last few months"—

and we must remember that he was speaking in November—

> "have seen a surge in business optimism in nearly every sector, nearly every region, in businesses large and small . . . This gives powerful support to our view of the recovery."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 453.]

Of course, that was the line to be used in a November general election—an election that did not happen.

As we now know, even the Institute of Directors—not a source known to be unremittingly hostile to the Conservative party—has found a sharp fall in the proportion of directors feeling optimistic about the economy. It reported a downturn in investment and said that the outlook for jobs was bleak. Construction, retail sales and business optimism all turned down as soon as the Chancellor fixed his eye on them. It is no wonder that businesses cringe at the prospect of becoming the Chancellor's latest projected vehicle for recovery. They know that he is, in that respect, the personification of voodoo economics.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain how it is possible for any future Labour Government to improve the position? Are not all the three factors that he mentioned the result of very high real interest rates within the exchange rage mechanism? As the new respectable Labour party has said that it wishes to remain within the ERM, and as it is likely—at least initially, and perhaps unfairly—to be badly viewed by the market, is it not likely that, far from being able to reduce interest rates, an incoming Labour Government would have to increase them, so making all those factors even worse?

Mr. Smith: I do not doubt that high interest rates have had a very bad effect on the British economy. However, I

must warn the hon. Gentleman about one matter—the line is not, "the new respectable Labour party"; the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten) gives a quite different line. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's points because, on the whole, he asks more intelligent questions than most of his colleagues.

The hon. Gentleman was right to say that high interest rates have had a considerable effect, but that is only half an analysis of the problem. The deplorable weaknesses in investment, training and education on the supply side have also weakened the British economy. That is why the Labour party's plans are so relevant.

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I will not give way—*[Interruption.]* I have given way as often as the Chancellor gave way.

What the British economy needs—and this directly answers the question of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen)—instead of bogus forecasts and stultifying complacency, is action to move out of recession towards an investment-led recovery.

The Chancellor has received strongly worded representations from British industry. He has them on his desk. They have come from the CBI, the engineering employers and others. They have argued for the introduction of measures to promote investment, including the enhancement of capital allowances for investment in new plant and machinery—*[Interruption.]* Actually, for the benefit of Conservative Members, that is a tax reduction—although I do not know whether they would know one if they saw one.

Given that manufacturing investment is below the level for 1979, the need to promote manufacturing investment is overwhelming. The Government's usual response is to claim that, under their management, business investment —which is, of course, different from manufacturing investment—has been highly satisfactory. I hear day in and day out that it is highly satisfactory. The Chancellor nods, so at least we agree on that. As hon. Members know, that is a familiar argument.

I ask those who might be in doubt about the truth to consider the CBI's Budget submission. Page 10 shows that in the United Kingdom fixed investment per employee over the last decade was well below the level that was achieved by our main competitors. Manufacturing investment per employee in the United Kingdom was £1,980; in the United States it was £2,850; in Germany it was £2,850; in France it was £3,300; and in Japan it was £5,360. The figures for business investment as a whole are roughly similar——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: Let me make the point.

If we have had such splendid investment under this Chancellor, why are our figures so bad in relation to those of our principal competitors?

Mr. Norman Lamont: Can the right hon. Gentleman name any year in the 1970s in which investment in plant and machinery as a proportion of GDP was as high as it is this year?

Mr. Smith: I shall certainly look into the details of the 1970s and 1980s because I want to be absolutely accurate. I shall tell the right hon. Gentleman what I do know because I do not make chance remarks across the Floor of the House without knowing what I am talking about. The right hon. Gentleman might bear that in mind when he considers forecasting. I can tell him that investment is plummeting this year. It was ridiculous of the right hon. Gentleman to claim earlier that we should be gratified because manufacturing investment has increased in the third quarter. Why on earth should we be gratified when manufacturing investment has fallen by 20 per cent. this year? What does it matter whether we are up or down slightly on the quarter when we are 20 per cent. down for the year as a whole? *[Interruption.]* That is a fact that the Chancellor cannot deny. If he wants to deny it, he should get to his feet. *[Interruption.]* He cannot deny that manufacturing investment fell—*[Interruption.]* Can he tell me a year in the 1970s when manufacturing investment fell by 20 per cent.?

Mr. Skinner: Get up.

Mr. Smith: I do not think that he can.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: If the Government——

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made it clear to me and the House that at the moment he is not prepared to give way. Hon. Members should not persist in seeking to intervene.

Mr. Smith: I believe that I have given way certainly as much as the Chancellor——

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: And I am being asked to give way again by a member of the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has issued an invitation about business investment and I shall now take him up on it. Investment in plant and machinery at constant prices——

Mr. Skinner: Here comes "Swank".

Mr. Mellor: It is no good the hon. Gentleman intervening. This is a serious matter, as his right hon. and learned Friend knows.

At constant prices, in investment in plant and machinery in 1979 was £19·7 billion. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman prefers, the average for the Labour years was £17·5 billion. In 1990, at constant prices *[Interruption.]* This is investment in plant and machinery —that is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman was concerned about. The figure was £32·6 billion in 1990, with a forecast for 1991——

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Oh, forecasts.

Mr. Mellor: —of £29·5 billion, which is 50 per cent. up in real terms on the figures for 1979—even in a recession.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has quoted the figures for business investment.

Mr. Mellor *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I am answering his point. I am not giving way—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should learn more manners. He should not interrupt someone who is speaking and who has already given way —[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] He should try, at least. The right hon. and learned Gentleman quoted a spurious statistic. He referred to business investment as a whole, but he knows that there is a distinction between that and manufacturing investment——

Mr. Mellor *rose*——

Mr. Smith: Yes, I shall give way if the right hon. Gentleman would like me to.

Mr. Mellor: Complaints about manners could become the last refuge of the parliamentary scoundrel. I shall tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* If there had not been so much noise earlier from the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), who is a bit more Lambeth council than learned counsel—*[Interruption.]* If there had not been so much shouting from the Opposition, the right hon. and learned Gentleman would have been able to hear. I am talking about the one thing that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is concerned about—investment in plant and machinery. That is the key indicator of what is going on in the British economy, and especially in manufacturing. The figure was £19·7 billion for 1979 and, at constant prices, £32·5 billion for 1990 and £29·5 billion for 1991.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has simply repeated the point that he has already made. He has not added anything new. He is talking about business expenditure as a whole, and there is an important distinction.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): We are seeing another example of sleight of hand from the Government Front Bench. They switched to business investment when the manufacturing investment figures were embarrassing because business investment includes empty office blocks. As the Chancellor told us, they have now switched to "core investment", which is investment in plant and machinery and includes all the investment in plant and machinery that has been made by the service industry as well as by those in the manufacturing sector. It includes the computers that are linked to supermarket checkouts. It is a completely different set of figures.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's strong support. He had a distinguished career at the Department of Industry when we had a Department that cared about British industry and worked hard to help and support it.

If the position is as good as the Government say, why is the CBI complaining so loudly about investment? I must get on, Madam Deputy Speaker, and deal with the autumn statement—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, do get on with it."] Well, I am doing my best, but I keep being interrupted.

When concern about falling investment is expressed in the House, the Government's response is one of dismissive complacency. In one of their recent denunciatory tracts on Labour policy, they even went as far as to warn against what they call

"force-feeding the economy with investment".

That appears to be the terrible peril lurking behind the next Labour Government. In that same document, the Government discussed the case for enhanced allowances for capital investment and dismissed them as if they did not matter. So, despite the recent arguments put forward by industry and the undeniable collapse in investment—and it cannot be denied—any change is ruled out by a Government who, I fear, are blinded by their own dogma.

When will the Government at last listen to the pleas of the construction industry, the local authorities and even of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service to relax the restrictive rules on local authorities using their own assets for capital investment? There are measures which the Government could take, but which they refuse to take, to help us to start to move out of recession. Opposition Members will continue to argue for action to encourage investment, to develop skills, to promote technology and to stimulate our vital regions.

In the motion the Government congratulate themselves on what they call "firm control over public expenditure" and on

"increasing spending in priority areas"

as if they had made a conscious choice to favour increased expenditure in some areas. If we examine the details, however, we discover that a great deal of the increase is the by-product of the recession which has been caused by the Government's own incompetence. In evidence to the Select Committee, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said:

"around £5 billion could be directly attributable to the stage of the cycle."

In plain English, that means "as a result of the recession." The right hon. and learned Gentleman also told the Committee that, for example, at least half the increase to London Transport and British Rail related to what he called

"the shortfall in business due to the recession".

He added:

"And most of the increases in the Department of Employment Budget relate to the increased requirements . . . as a result of the increase in unemployment."

It is all too obvious that the more that unemployment rises, the greater the cost to the public purse.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding) *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I must get on.

In his autumn statement, under questioning from my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), the Chancellor had to concede that the Government's assumption about unemployment in the coming year is 2·4 million. That still appears to be the Government's assumption, but we already know—only a few months after the autumn statement—that unemployment has risen to 2·54 million. The Government's assumption is already adrift by 140,000 unemployed and by the costs that that will involve. As unemployment regrettably continues to rise, the disparity between assumption and reality will become greater and the autumn statement's figures increasingly out of date.

In any case, when we consider Conservative promises about public expenditure immediately prior to an election, the public are entitled to a healthy degree of cynicism. As the CBI noted——

Mr. Favell *rose*——

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman might at least listen to what the CBI said. The CBI's economic situation report of November 1991 noted that under the Conservatives

"underlying spending rises in election periods—this pattern is being repeated".

How right the CBI is.

Let us look back to the period before the 1987 general election. Then, the Conservatives promised increased expenditure over three years of £11·2 billion above and beyond the amount needed to make up for inflation. In fact, during the three years that followed the election, there was no real increase, but a cumulative cut of £12·7 billion.

When the autumn statement was first presented to the House in November, Opposition Members said that it was a gigantic confidence trick, in terms of both its economic assessment and its public expenditure promises. Nothing that has happened in the ensuing months makes us wish to change that verdict.

Mr. Norman Lamont: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman is talking about confidence tricks, will he tell us when he will answer the question that he said he would answer about how the increases in child benefit are to be financed if the abolition of the upper earnings limit on national insurance is to be phased? It does not add up.

Mr. Smith: I told the right hon. Gentleman that I would give way to him, and I now do so. The revenue increases referred to in Labour's election proposals more than cover those commitments; there is no difficulty whatever. *[Interruption.]* There is not the slightest problem.

Mr. Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has not answered the question. As he knows, he has given the impression that the increases would take place immediately, but he says that the national insurance changes would have to be phased in. What he also appears to have left out of his calculations is the fact that the changes that he proposes to make in the higher rate of tax will, in the first year, produce only half the revenue that he estimates that he will receive.

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman is asking me to give details of a Budget when he will not even tell us what his Budget may bring. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I can barely hear, but I understand that I have been asked to allow a point of order. I am sure that it is genuine.

Mr. Thurnham: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has implied that he answered my earlier intervention, but he did not.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate; it is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Smith: Every day, there is speculation in the press about whether the Chancellor will cut the standard rate of tax by 1p, whether he will increase personal allowances, whether he will do this and whether he will do that. He must deal with a huge range of options in a few weeks. Now, Opposition Members are expected to give details when the Chancellor will not.

Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman this. We shall be able to raise—from increases in the top rate of income tax, and by removing the upper limit on national insurance contributions—more than enough to pay for the increases that we propose. Every commentator agrees that that is so. As the Chancellor knows, the trouble with his promises is that, while giving the impression that he is committed to increases in public expenditure, he also pledges to cut the standard rate of tax from 25p to 20p in the pound. He has constantly reiterated that promise. How is it possible for the right hon. Gentleman to maintain the spending plans that he announced in the autumn statement if he is going to cut the standard rate of tax by that amount? [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]

Mr. Norman Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that the question that I asked him earlier was like a question asked about a Budget before that Budget had taken place. However, he has repeatedly given the impression, on television and in the House, that his package would finance itself out of the national insurance increases. He has assumed that £2½ billion can be obtained from payments of income tax at the higher rate. What he does not seem to understand is that, in the first year, only £1¼ billion is obtained. The money is not there—even before we take account of the right hon. Gentleman's industry package.

Mr. Smith: The House will have noticed that the Chancellor has not said a single word about the Tory pledge to cut the standard rate of tax from 25p to 20p. If he reads the considerable debate that is now taking place in the public press about the respective tax and spending plans of the Conservatives and Labour, he will find that no objective commentator supports the point that he is making. *[Interruption.]* I am talking about objective commentators; the Tory tabloids are a different matter.

Mr. Mellor: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I must get on with my speech. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Do I understand that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is giving way?

Mr. Smith: Yes.

Mr. Mellor: Fair enough. I hope that a further intervention will be unnecessary.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman believes that all this has been got up by Tory-inclined commentators, let him answer a straight question: did he know what his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was going to say to the journalists at Luigi's?

Mr. Smith: Did the Chief Secretary know that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I think that it is about time that we heard about these pledges to lower the standard rate of tax from 25p to 20p. It is an important point. Whenever the Conservatives are challenged about the matter, they quietly tell the commentators, "You need not worry; we shall not actually implement the tax-cutting pledge", or, "We shall not implement it in the lifetime of a single Parliament", or, "It will be done very gradually, and it will not cause any difficulty."

The Chief Secretary gave the game away when he told the Today programme on 20 June 1991:

"If people are actually putting forward pledges it is right that those pledges should be seen as being implemented within the lifetime of a Parliament over 5 years."

[Mr. Smith]

I take it that that applies to the Tory pledge to cut tax from 25p to 20p. If I am wrong, I will give way once more so that the right hon. and learned Gentleman can put things right.

Mr. Mellor: Every time that we have spoken about the matter, it has been made clear that that pledge is not timed, and that, when the time is right, further progress will be made towards our objective. There has never been any doubt about that. If what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has said about his pledges was as clear-cut as what we say has always been, we should be a good deal better off.

Mr. Smith: I am very glad that I gave way to the Chief Secretary, because his intervention allows me to put on record what the Prime Minister said in an interview with the *Daily Express* on 26 April last year. He said:

"Our primary objective is to reduce taxation at the lower end. There will be changes at the upper end, but we have an objective of moving to a 20p level of taxation."

What the Chief Secretary said—and I do not think that he understands the significance of his own comments—was:

"If people are . . . putting forward pledges it is right that those pledges should be seen as being implemented within the lifetime of a Parliament over 5 years."

In his Adam Smith Institute lecture on 12 April 1991, the Chancellor said:

"Our 20p remains a firm objective".

A pledge given by the Labour party must be implemented within five years; the Tories can take as long as they like.

I am trying very hard to return to the subject of the autumn statement. We know perfectly well, however, that when the Conservatives talk about taxation, they talk hypocritically. Their's is the party that increased the burden of taxation from over 34 per cent. to over 37 per cent., and pushed up valued added tax from 8 per cent. in 1979 to the current rate of 17·5 per cent. Conservative Members have been unable to tell us how they would maintain their pledges while simultaneously cutting income tax on the scale that they propose. It is probably true that the Conservative party is the party of choice, but what is the choice? The choice is between cutting spending on vital public services and putting up value added tax. That is the choice that the Conservatives would offer if they were re-elected.

The debate will go on about the Government's competence and about the tax and spending pledges of both sides. In case the House thinks that Opposition criticism of the Government's competence is something that we have invented or that it is the product of political malice, exaggeration or even hyperbole—which occasionally can be found in the speeches of right hon. and hon. Members—let me remind it of the measured conclusion of Mr. Samuel Brittan. In the *Financial Times* of 19 December 1991 he wrote:

"British Treasury forecasters have performed a hat trick. They failed to foresee the inflationary boom of the late 1980s; they failed to foresee the subsequent recession, and then they forecast a fictitious recovery."

I do not blame the Treasury civil servants. I blame the Treasury Ministers who were in charge during that period. With such an abysmal record—unemployment rising, businesses collapsing and homes being repossessed—one might think that an apology from the Government to the House and the people was in order. But not a bit of it. They are still as bold as ever they were. The Prime Minister told us that if it was not hurting it was not working. I hope that everyone who has been hurt remembers exactly why they are being hurt—because it is part of the Government's plan.

The Chancellor told us that the recession, rising unemployment, record bankruptcies and an unprecedented level of repossessions were a price well worth paying—words that will be remembered by every British elector at the next election. To cap it all, this month the Chancellor had the gall to say at the January meeting of the National Economic Development Council that

"the policy would not have been different had we known the outcome."

So the recession was part of the plan, the result of the Government's policies. The British electorate will soon be able to pass their verdict on a Government who treat their interests with such cavalier disregard.

5.31 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I thank my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer for his kind remarks about the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. It provides, I believe, a helpful background to the debate. It was a unanimous report. The evidence that backed up the report is also helpful.

I listened with great interest to the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). The crucial point in economic management is that, if one is to achieve sustainable economic growth, inflation must be brought under control. It is interesting to note that in a speech lasting more than 45 minutes the right hon. and learned Gentleman never addressed the crucial issue of inflation. That is a point of considerable significance, as we know the record of previous Labour Governments on inflation.

It is not easy to get inflation under control. It is vital that the Government maintain their present anti-inflationary posture, based on membership of the exchange rate mechanism and the use of interest rates. The Government are right to resist the cries of those who wish both devaluation and a reduction in interest rates to be used to kick-start the economy. If one kicks with both feet, the economy will probably go up in the air and end up on its back. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is therefore absolutely right to maintain the exchange rate value of the pound.

In my view, it should also be possible for the present exchange rate to be kept within the ERM limits without an increase in interest rates. That is very much a tribute to the prudent polices of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, which have led to a gradual reduction in interest rates. There has been a substantial reduction in interest rates. If we had listened to the Opposition's cries for a reduction in interest rates, I do not doubt that now we would find it necessary to raise them again. The trend in interest rates is crucial to business confidence. I believe that the Government have adopted the right approach.

I am bound to say, however, that recently we have had little co-operation from the other members of the European Community. The rise in interest rates in Germany did not help. That may be a warning against the dangers of an independent central bank. It would be very dangerous if we were to listen to those who say that we ought to withdraw from the exchange rate mechanism. If we withdrew, we would cease to have influence in Europe, particularly in resisting protectionist pressures. Even with

a cut in interest rates and devaluation, I do not believe that we would achieve stability. There would be the usual J-curve effect. There would be a deterioration in the balance of payments and a succession of devaluations. I strongly support the points that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor put at the centre of his policies, which have led to such a substantial reduction in inflation and in interest rates.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East referred to public spending. He said that the Government had not placed sufficient emphasis on extra spending in priority areas. I shall take just one example, the national health service, which—outside the broad economic debate—has been the focus of the Opposition's attack. It is important to look at the figures in the autumn statement. They show a massive increase of almost £2·5 billion last year, 1990-91, in expenditure on the national health service, an additional £3·1 billion this year and another £2·4 billion increase next year.

It is difficult for people to comprehend such massive increases in expenditure. It is interesting to note that the announcement that an extra £2 million was to be spent on reducing waiting lists attracted far more publicity than the announcement that an additional £1·5 billion was to be spent on the national health service. The Government are giving priority to the health service. It is absurd rubbish to talk about cuts in the health service. It is important to get that point over to the public at large.

I turn to a more controversial point. Traditionally, we have divided the annual cycle of economic management between public expenditure—the autumn statement—and taxation, which is dealt with in the spring Budget. Some years ago, I chaired the Select Committee on Procedure (Finance) when it looked at the case for bringing the two sides of the equation together.

Treasury forecasts have been singularly fallible recently. The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee is considering what might be done to improve them. At present, one finds after a short period—perhaps just a few months—that an adjustment needs to be made to the economy because the forecasts were wrong. It is absurd to say that, if it happens in the spring, it must be done by tax changes and, if it happens in the autumn, the adjustment must be made on the expenditure side. One understands the inhibitions against changing that. They are historic. Traditions in this place take a long while to break down.

Because we seemed to have Budgets every other week under the previous Labour Government, we have been reluctant to do anything in the autumn statement that involves tax or something in the Budget that involves expenditure. I do not suggest that adjustments should be made every other week, but a division between expenditure and taxation is not always appropriate. It should be possible to make appropriate adjustments in tax or expenditure at either time of the year. One can always get a stigma to beat a dogma on this sort of historical analogy, but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will bear that point in mind.

On a number of occasions the Treasury and Civil Service Committee has pointed out that membership of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system substantially inhibits the use of monetary policy. Therefore, we have argued that there is a strong case for a more active fiscal policy. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor accepted our views on the use of automatic stabilisers, but we have suggested for a long time that there is a case for changes in discretionary expenditure.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on maintaining our right in this country, and in the House of Commons in particular, to have a fiscal policy. If we had gone along with what the Labour party supported, the negotiations at Maastricht would have seriously inhibited the future use of fiscal policy. That would have been damaging. My right hon. Friend was right to fight for that, and I am glad that he succeeded in ensuring that we can continue to use fiscal policy when it is appropriate to do so —I hope that he will not now hesitate to do so if necessary.

We well know all the arguments against fine tuning. I understand the concern of my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Prime Minister about the need to avoid the situation in which one stimulates the economy and then has measures coming into operation when a boom is already under way. The Government's experience is reason to believe that that is important. Nevertheless, it is possible to take some public expenditure measures which are time limited and which would stimulate the economy without endangering the crucial medium-term control of public expenditure. We should not say that, because we may sometimes get the timing wrong, we should not take measures where the timing is specifically under control.

It has been said in this debate and previously that the recession has been deeper and longer than any of us hoped or anyone, except the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, had forecast. It is true that, regrettably, the recession has been deeper and longer than was expected. It is important to say why that has happened. Clearly—my right hon. Friend recognised this—we have had a substantial cut in interest rates and a corresponding reduction in mortgage rates. I looked at the figures the other day. A person with an average endowment mortgage of £30,000—the position is not much different for a repayment mortgage—is £82 a month better off than when we joined the ERM. A person with a £60,000 mortgage is £192 a month better off and a person with a £120,000 mortgage is £413 a month better off.

It is surprising that those cuts, which are important for householders, have not worked their way through into the economy. People have tended to pay off other debts, particularly credit card bills that they have run up during a time of high mortgage rates, or saved the money. As the Select Committee points out in its report, the role of savings is crucial in this respect. That being so, one must realise that that cushion is having a delaying effect. However, I do not doubt that the cuts in interest rates will gradually work through into the system. I do not go along with the so-called double-dip recession which has been forecast by some people. I believe that we shall see a steady improvement.

A cut in direct taxation now would probably suffer from the effects of a similar cushion. There is some case for avoiding the pushing-on-a-string effect. We should see whether something can be done with time-limited public expenditure.

I want to talk about local authority expenditure and the vast accumulated balances that local authorities now have. In a report which was formally published a few days ago on the Bank of Credit and Commerce International and the role of local authorities and money brokers, we pointed out that the conjuncture of Government policies and market conditions had led to a considerable increase

[Mr. Terence L. Higgins]

in the level of local authority external investments. The investments have increased from £4·4 billion in 1986 to £11 billion at the end of 1989 and the figure is just short of £8 billion now. Local authorities are not allowed to spend that money. I am not advocating that the brakes should be taken off and that they should be allowed to spend it all but we should seriously consider whether some relaxation on a time-limited basis might be appropriate.

It is clear from our report that the financial decisions of local authorities have been pro-cyclical rather than anti-cyclical. We point out in our report that in 1989-90 local authority capital expenditure was £10·5 billion and that it fell to £7·7 billion in 1991. In short, the decisions of local authorities have made the boom bigger and the recession worse. We need to look carefully at the way in which the huge accumulated balances and the decisions of local authorities have been distorting the operation of the economy as a whole. They are big enough to have a significant effect on the management of the economy. We cannot hope simply to sterilise those balances indefinitely. A recession is an appropriate time to ameliorate the matter to some extent.

I have restricted my remarks to the Government's policy, except for saying that the Opposition do not give the slightest priority to the control of inflation. The Opposition believe that the cap on national insurance contributions should be removed. I have tried hard to think of any insurance premium where the amount paid for any given level of benefits depends upon one's income. I have not managed to do so. Once one carries out the Labour party's proposal, any idea that it is a national insurance premium would go out the window. It is a straight increase in taxation.

Mr. John Smith: What did the right hon. Gentleman think of the Government when they removed the cap on employers' contributions?

Mr. Higgins. That is another matter. Someone else making a contribution to a given benefit is not the same as a contribution from the individual who is expecting to benefit.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. What did he think when the Government raised the national insurance contribution and steadily cut away at the benefits for which it was paid? I do not recall an insurance company finding it easy to do that.

Mr. Higgins: That has been known to happen, but I agree that it has not happened often.

The way in which the Opposition's policy is being formulated clearly involves a massive increase in taxation. However one disguises it or seeks to dress it up as an insurance premium, that is the reality. Labour's proposals on taxation and public expenditure are likely to prove highly inflationary, which would be disastrous for the future management of the economy. To get the economy back on an even keel, it is crucial to control inflation. The Government have steadily made progress in that respect, which has enabled them to reduce interest rates. The combination of the controlling of inflation and the reduction in interest rates will enable us to return to a sustainable rate of economic growth.

That is the right approach for the Government to adopt, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on resisting the calls for devaluation and cuts. It is important to ensure that the effects of our membership of the exchange rate mechanism on the control of inflation are brought out strongly.

5.50 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) spent most of his speech—and much the best part of it—dealing with the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. The Chancellor should pay more heed to its reports, which are so ably steered through the Committee by the right hon. Member for Worthing. They have consistently been more accurate than Government forecasts, especially on growth.

The advice accompanying them has also been good. If the Government had taken note of the report on, for example, public expenditure, they could have significantly countered the cyclical recessionary effects about which they speak so much. By the Committee's standards, they are at least a year late in some of the discretionary expenditure that they have made. I hope that the Chancellor will pay more heed to the Committee's reports.

That brings me to the fundamental point of what we are debating today. For much of the time, I suspect that we shall debate the general election and the battle that it involves rather than the autumn statement, but there is another reason why much of the debate will not be about the autumn statement—it is out of date. It is like trying to navigate the railway system with a Soviet railway timetable —it bears no resemblance to the trains that run. That is certainly the condition of the autumn statement. I do not know why the Chancellor did not do more to update the forecasts made in it. After all, the Prime Minister updates the forecasts that the Chancellor made in the statement.

Even the comments that the Chancellor made some time after the autumn statement failed to take account of how inaccurate his forecasts were proving. He said:

> "I have no reason to revise my view that GDP will show a modest increase in the second half of this year and that recovery will accelerate this year. That is what I said in the Budget and in the autumn statement. That is what I say now." —[*Official Report*, 5 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 425.]

Between 5 December and new year's day, the picture had changed. In his new year's day interview, the Prime Minister said that recovery looked "a little less certain", which he found "frustrating". He said:

> "My judgment is, although it is jagged and irregular, in retrospect we will look back and say it has already started as we speak."

The opportunity to look back and say that recovery had started on 1 January still has not arisen, and I suspect that it will not do so this side of the general election.

What are the autumn statement's forecasts? Are they genuine statistical forecasts about the economy, or are they hyped up by ministerial desire to look optimistic and sound encouraging? They show many signs of the latter. It is always noticeable that, when they are wrong, they are too optimistic. Almost no Government forecast is excessively pessimistic. Occasionally, forecasts of revenue are too pessimistic, but forecasts of growth, output and inflation are always too optimistic. They give every impression of having been massaged to have an economic effect of their own—to try to instil the confidence that Ministers understandably seek.

They do not have that effect, and the more that they appear to be massaged, the less they inspire confidence, because people have long since given up believing ministerial forecasts. It is time that we made the role of statistics clearer and made it clearer that they will be independently produced and published and will form part of the Government's attempt to inspire and encourage the populace, which is the impression that we have gained from them so far.

Statistics in Government forecasts are too optimistic, so their policy decisions must visibly correspond with them. That results in Ministers making policy decisions that prove as mistaken as the forecasts.

Misleading claims go with mistaken decisions. Departmental press releases at the time of autumn statements are riddled with misstatements or half-truths about the nature of the improved resources said to be available to the Departments and industries concerned.

Many of the Government's claims about spending do not fit with the reality. For example, Ministers never properly explained the difference between the real inflation faced by local authorities and the inflation that they claim to be compensating for in the spending assessments that they set for local authorities. Tomorrow, a delegation of every high school head teacher in Northumberland will come down to London to lobby the House because Northumberland education authority is imposing swingeing cuts on the education service. More than 100 teachers are being made redundant in an area that is large geographically but small numerically.

One can argue that, over the years, Northumberland did not foresee the extent to which its rising budgets would lead to that problem, but a significant part of the problem results from the fact that what the authority is allowed to spend does not correspond with real inflation and the additional burdens placed on it. That is true in many service areas. It is particularly worrying and damaging that it is happening in education.

The timing of Government expenditure has also been wrong. Paragraph 80 of the report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee says:

"We recommend that the financial regime for local authority capital spending should be adjusted so that it is counter-cyclical, so that it does not compete with the private sector during years of higher growth, but assists its suppliers such as the construction industry when growth is below trend."

The obvious time for significant additional expenditure on local authority services and local authority capital investment is a recession, when the construction industry is flat on its back. Additional spending could help to create longer-term assets, create employment at a time of high unemployment and counter-cyclical trends. That would help more than making such expenditure at a time when it becomes inflationary, because it is added to considerable overheating pressures in the economy. The autumn statement was seriously at fault on all those points.

I must comment on some aspects of Labour's approach, because two Labour amendments appear on the Order Paper. The one that has visible support from more Labour Members talks about the evils of capitalism and market forces and calls for full-blooded socialist policies, including:

"the harnessing of the nation's savings",

whatever that may be. It sounds suspiciously like local authority pension funds that invest in politically approved projects, such as failed newspapers, because3 they are thought to be a good thing rather than because they represent a sound deal for the authority's pensioners.

There is another tendency in the Labour party that is by no means dead. It may be temporarily defeated, but it will clearly be a force to be reckoned with in a future Parliament.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Which of Labour's amendments does the hon. Gentleman prefer —the one that he is talking about, which at least proposes a change from the Government's policy, or the official Opposition amendment, which, in general macro-economic terms, pursues a policy virtually identical to that of the Government?

Mr. Beith: The official Opposition amendment is markedly different from the one that I have been describing. It is significant more for its omissions than for its content. In its content, it reflects the significant change that has taken place in Labour Front-Bench policy—the gap between the two makes that contrast particularly stark —but it does not say what the Labour party would do about inflation or the fiscal problems that emerged earlier in the debate. That is another area where there is a great puzzle about Labour policy.

Labour advances proposals for the funding of the benefit and pension increases as if they were self-financing. It sincerely and genuinely proposed to finance those increases by uncapping the national insurance contribution and levying two top rates of tax, one of which is very much higher at a combined rate of 59 per cent. There might be a bit to spare—it is difficult to forecast such revenues—but that is what Labour would have done.

There is now talk of phasing in the national insurance change which is a significant part of the whole. If that is done, it casts doubt on the self-financing nature of the pensions and benefits pledge. That is a simple point. If the Labour party still wants to maintain its earlier approach and wants to set out its clear commitments and how it will pay for them, it must update its proposals. It would be reasonable to expect it to come up with a new set.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Beith: I shall, but it will be for the last time, because I am about to be hit by the 10-minute rule.

Mr. McAvoy: To my mind, the hon. Gentleman has outlined the fact quite clearly that he would find working with the Labour party in a future Parliament unacceptable. Will he be honest and say that he is making a commitment to work with the Tory party after the next election?

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman has drawn a fascinating conclusion from what I said. I gave the Labour party some honest and sincere advice on what it should do about its tax and benefit proposals during the debate on the autumn statement. I am not a socialist or a Conservative but a Liberal Democrat. If the hon. Gentleman will give me a little time, I shall explain the Liberal Democrats' policies, which will be advocated during the election and which we shall seek to pursue in the next Parliament with whatever power the electors give us.

Recent economic mismanagement has merely added short-term misery to the long-term failures of successive

[Mr. Beith]

British Governments who have not been willing to face some of the fundamental changes that our economy and society need. Since the early 1950s, the value of the pound has dropped dramatically. From a 1951 value of 100, the mark has gone down to 32 and the dollar to 19, but the pound has gone down to seven.

Unemployment has increased again and again during the same period, reaching new heights under the present Government in the 1980s and it is now returning to those heights. If we were still using the same figures to calculate unemployment as we used earlier in that decade, we would now almost have reached those very high figures—we are certainly heading in that direction even under the Government's much more limited calculation of unemployment. Britain's imports have risen fourfold in value while our exports have barely doubled during the same period.

Those figures represent serious long-term problems, and long-term measures are needed to tackle them. Such measures must include serious investment in our education system so that we get it right. It is not enough merely to improve it as the current debate is designed to do, and the report published today is a contribution to the effort to improve primary education. However, it cannot be done without resources, which is why we shall be prepared, if necessary, to put a penny on income tax to generate those resources. If we can find them without doing that, we shall do so, but additional investment of about £2 billion is certainly required for the education system. Labour cannot deny that, as it must be aware of the problems facing some of the local authorities that it controls.

We need investment in transport, and such investment could also have been made earlier in the recession. It would have been better for getting the channel tunnel links constructed in time and for countering the cyclical effects of the recession. We also need investment in research and development, but changes are also needed in other policies.

We need to promote competition more aggressively and to break down the huge monopolies which have been created as a result of privatisation. We need genuine competition. There is no real competition in, for example, the electricity industry in which two large generating companies control the entire market between them and can therefore have a rigged market in their dealings with British Coal. There is no genuine competition—only a market controlled by two very large concerns.

We need long-term anti-inflation policies. We believe that an independent central bank is the right mechanism for that and that, in the end, we shall have it because of the development of a European central bank and a single currency. The question is, how long will the United Kingdom wait to get fully involved in that process? Time and time again, we have taken decisions but much later than we should have done, with the consequence that our economy is suffering.

Our entire role in Europe remains in question because Governments have not faced the inevitability of full British participation. There is no realistic future for Britain outside a strong single currency bloc such as is being created in Europe.

We also need changes in the way in which the country is governed. We need the stability that would come from a fair electoral system and the initiative that would come from the decentralisation of power as opposed to the current centralisation. Real change is required, not merely new management. Such change would have led to a very different autumn statement and to much better prospects for recovery.

My party believes that, during the election campaign, it will be necessary for parties to show as clearly as they can what their fundamental commitments are to the character of our society, on what changes they intend to spend money in the early days of a new Parliament and how they will finance them. We shall set out our proposals. The Liberal Democrats will offer a menu with prices.

The public would be entitled to view the promises of all parties with some scepticism, in view of the fact that the Government who said that they would be repaying £19 billion of public debt in the current two-year cycle are in fact borrowing a further £19 billion, thereby showing that their spending assessments were no less than £38 billion wide of the mark. Nevertheless, parties must make some pledges about their intentions and must show some honesty about where tax increases might be necessary. They must also offer some clarity in their tax proposals if they are to expect the electorate to believe anything they say.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Standing Order limiting speeches to 10 minutes is now in operation.

6.5 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): There are three matters arising from this year's autumn statement on which I wish to comment. The first is the Treasury forecast about the recovery, the second is how relevant Labour's spending and taxation policies are to the problems facing the United Kingdom and what damage would be done to public finance if they were implemented, and the third is the medium-term financial strategy.

Why has the long-awaited and long-forecast recovery —long forecast by the Government—not materialised? There are a number of reasons, but two principal ones. The first is that real interest rates are far too high. That is a direct result of our membership of the exchange rate mechanism and the abandonment of a floating exchange rate. Interest rates have ceased to be an instrument of monetary policy and have become an instrument of exchange rate policy.

Despite the fact that nominal interest rates have dropped by no less than 4·5 per cent., real interest rates —at 6·1 per cent.—are at a historically high level and double what they were during the previous recession in 1981. That can only be perverse when the country is in a deep recession. In real terms, small businesses are paying a minimum of 9 per cent. on their borrowings, and many are paying more.

The reduction in nominal interest rates has not had the effect for which we had hoped. Instead of large reductions of 2 per cent. or 2·5 per cent. which would have kick-started the economy, we have had small reductions of 0·5 per cent., which have had less impact.

I appreciate the fact that the Government have been constrained in the way that they have reduced interest rates by their membership of the exchange rate mechanism, but, by introducing small reductions, they have dissipated the effect. That is similar to what happened

when the economy overheated in 1988. Instead of banging up interest rates by 2 per cent. to bring the economy to a halt, to get the overheating over quickly and get us going again, the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), had a salami policy of death by a thousand cuts, and put them up 0·5 per cent. at a time.

This year, all the financial indicators have been screaming for interest rate cuts. Those indicators include the decline in the rate of increase of broad money, consumer credit, declining corporate profits, a flat housing market, rising unemployment, poor retail sales, falling industrial investment and falling inflation. The Government have achieved their major objective of bringing inflation down, and the only reason that interest rates have not come down by 2 per cent. to 2·5 per cent. more is our membership of the exchange rate mechanism.

If interest rates had come down to that extent, the pound would admittedly have been a little lower but that would have boosted export markets. Mortgage payers would have had their burdens eased, and many small businesses would have been saved and consumer spending would be rising.

Mr. Budgen: May I interrupt my hon. Friend for a moment?

Mr. Townend: I have only 10 minutes, so I shall not give way. I hope that my hon. Friend does not mind.

The housing market would also be recovering. If by any mischance we do not win the election, the principal cause will be seen in retrospect to be the fact that we joined the exchange rate mechanism and handed over monetary control to the Bundesbank. Our country and our industry are having to bear the burden of Germany's battle to control the inflation caused by reunification. Surely that is not in the national interest. Indeed, the recent increase in interest rates by the Bundesbank has curtailed the possibility of the Government's making another long-awaited and very necessary reduction in interest rates.

It is ironic that both the Labour party and the Liberal party urged the Government to join the ERM more than a year before we joined. Indeed, the Labour party has made it clear today—its Front-Bench spokesman did not deny the fact—that it would keep us in the ERM and would not realign the parity. So the Opposition have made it clear that the Labour party is also the party of high interest rates.

The second cause of the continued recession is outside our control—it is world recession. Output has fallen, or growth has slowed, in most of the G7 countries. France has been badly hit and the United States is suffering quite badly. But because the United States is not hogtied by the ERM or a fixed exchange rate, it has done what we should have done, and its interest rates, from being at a historic high, are at a 25-year low. It is to be hoped that that will stimulate a recovery in the United States, which will help to revive the economies of the western world.

In the autumn statement, the Treasury said that the United Kingdom was emerging from the recession, and that the recovery would be led by consumer spending, stocks and exports. We are now at the end of January, and I have to say that there is little sign of recovery. The housing market is as dead as a dodo, repossessions and mortgage arrears are still rising, and the construction and motor industries are flat on the floor. The retail trade has had a bad Christmas, and January is even worse. In my constituency, there have been three major closures in the past three months.

There is a lack of confidence. What we need now is a kick start to get the economy going. In my view, a monetary stimulus would be best. Once the economy gets going again, if there is a danger of inflation starting to rise, it will be easy to reverse a monetary stimulus. A 2 per cent. drop in interest rates would do the trick; it would get the housing market going immediately and restore the confidence that is so badly lacking.

However, that would require a realignment, and as not only the Government but all the Opposition parties seem to have set their faces against that, we are left with a fiscal stimulus as the only alternative. In my view, that is second best, because it inevitably leads to an increase in the budget deficit, and once the economy is moving, it is more difficult to reverse than a monetary stimulus.

A fiscal stimulus can be obtained by cutting taxes or by increasing Government spending. I favour the former, but the increased expenditure in the autumn statement can be justified by the recession. However, I question the need for some of that increased spending, especially in Scotland, where spending is already so much higher than in England. For example, in Scotland we spend £475 per person on hospital treatment, as against £378 in England, and we give £1,150 per person in support to local authorities, whereas in England we give only £733 per person. In Scotland, we spend £1,900 per pupil on education, as against £1,200 in England. Those are not my figures; they were given by the Minister of State, Scottish Office, and published in *The Times* this week.

That expenditure no longer represents the relative populations of the two countries.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Townend: I only have 10 minutes, so I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman will have to make his points in his own speech.

In view of our present balance of payments deficit, I question whether this country can really afford to spend £2 billion on overseas aid. I question, too, whether at this time the country should increase spending on the arts.

Hon. Members should note, as should the public, how the cost of our membership of the European Community rises inexorably year after year, as the Community increases its spending at a significant rate. That cost will soon be almost £3 billion.

Additional spending should be supplemented in the Budget by reductions in taxation to stimulate the recovery. There should be help for small businesses. I suggest that the first £10,000 of retained profit should be tax-free. There should be help for industry, and capital allowances should be written off on a straight-line basis rather than a reducing balance basis. Perhaps, for one year only, small businesses could have 100 per cent. capital allowances on expenditure of not more than £50,000.

In that context, the Labour party's proposals to increase taxes and national insurance contributions would only make the recession worse and reduce confidence. Furthermore, proposed Labour increases in public expenditure would have to be funded by further increases in taxation on the majority of the population, or a Labour

[Mr. Townend]

Government would run up a budget deficit way above the level of 3 per cent. of gross domestic product stipulated by Brussels.

The Labour party's proposals would cost between £30 billion and £35 billion a year; and—this is what Labour Members never mention—another £8 billion would have to be added to that total to make up for privatisation proceeds which a Labour Government would not receive, as the Labour party does not intend to continue with privatisation. All that would have to be added to the £20 billion public sector borrowing requirement estimated in the autumn statement.

Unless the Labour party makes major changes in policy and admits that all its promises of more expenditure on every policy area were mistaken, a Labour Government would have to increase taxes to the punitive levels of the 1970s.

Finally, the medium-term financial strategy—the MTFS—is dead if not buried. It was supposed to provide a framework in which macro-economic policies would be conducted over a rolling four-year programme, and to impose a discipline. But a continual abandonment of targets on expenditure, on the growth of monetary aggregates, and on inflation has made the MTFS hardly worth the paper it is written on.

As one who supports financial rectitude and believes in a balanced budget, I feel great sadness that, having achieved a balanced budget and then a surplus, the Government have been driven off course by recession into having an increasing budget deficit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sorry, but I must interrupt the hon. Gentleman. He has exceeded his time.

6.15 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Financial Times* tell us today that the Prime Minister has decided that the general election will be held on 9 April. I welcome that decision, because it removes doubt and uncertainty which could otherwise damage the country's economic prospects.

In the expectation that a Labour Government will come to power later this year, the big question being asked at the Treasury is not, "Can we work with Labour policies?"—top civil servants have agreed that our policies are better for Britain than Tory policies—but, "Who will be the next permanent secretary?" The current incumbent, Sir Terence Burns, a professional economist, was a political appointment. As the architect of two Tory slumps in one decade, Sir Terence put more people out of work than anyone else in the history of Britain. My advice to him is, "Get on your bike, Terry. Find yourself another job. As an economist and a civil servant, you are finished".

Meanwhile, at the Bank of England people are desperate to know who will replace Mr. Robin Leigh-Pemberton, the dilettante appointed as Governor by the former Prime Minister—he was her husband's golfing partner. I am tempted to suggest a rakishly radical appointment—

Mr. Beith: Yourself?

Mr. Sedgemore: I am tempted to give the answer that the former Prime Minister gave when such suggestions were made—but on second thoughts I believe that the Labour party should plump for a Governor who believes in low inflation as the basis for sound economic growth and high employment. That means that Eddie George, the current Deputy Governor, should get the job. Eddie may not be such a good cricketer as Mr. Leigh-Pemberton, but he knows a hell of a lot more about banking.

I digress. I really wanted to tell the House that, during the past week, I have undertaken one of the most intensive investigations ever made. I have been to every corner of the kingdom, searching and seeking, in pursuit of at least one economic indicator that justified the assertion that the Tories are efficient economic managers. I have combed every library; I have read and reread every statistical statement on the British economy made between 1949 and 1992. I have consulted eminent economists, trawled through the national income accounts, and carried out endless computer runs.

In all honesty, I have to admit that I have failed. It has been a case of "mission unaccomplished". The data are conclusive, and show not only that the Tory party is the party of high taxation and high unemployment, but, contrariwise, that it is also the party of low investment and low output. When it comes to economic incompetence, the ragamuffins sitting on the Government Benches have no rivals. The idea of the Tories as efficient economic managers in the locust years of 1979-82 is an illusion, a mirage and a will-o'-the-wisp which belongs to the media world of make-believe.

When Swift said that all political parties die of swallowing their own lies, he had clearly anticipated the Tory claim in the 1990s that the Tory pary is the party of low taxation. If taxation is theft, the biggest thief Britain has ever known is the man whom the current opinion polls show to be the most unpopular Chancellor of the Exchequer—the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Thames (Mr. Lamont). He is despised even by his next-door neighbour, the Prime Minister. His incompetent best, not to mention the figures, makes him a laughing stock.

According to the Chancellor's own autumn statement, tax as a percentage of gross domestic product in the last year of the Labour Government, 1978-79, was 34·3 per cent. Under the Tories, it rose in 1981-82 to a colossal 39·9 per cent. of GDP. Today, it is, at 37·1 per cent., still way above what it was under Labour. The position is even worse. *[Interruption.]* According to Goldman Sachs, the Tory stockbrokers—I hope that the Financial Secretary will listen instead of muttering—way ahead, in 1994-95, tax under the Tories will go up even further, to 37·5 per cent. of GDP. Yet the Chancellor stood at the Dispatch Box today and had the temerity to say that the Tories were the party of low taxation.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sedgemore: No, because I know what the hon. Gentleman will say. He will make the introduction that his colleague the Economic Secretary to the Treasury made last time I made this comment. He will ask about borrowing in 1979. I will ask him about German borrowing. The Germans borrowed 5 per cent. of their GDP, and they have the strongest economy in Europe.

Mr. Maude: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sedgemore: No, I will not give way, because I have only 10 minutes.

With sound economic growth under the next Labour Government, taxation will fall as a percentage of GDP and there will be more public expenditure too. That is what the public want, and that is what we will give them. That is what our supply-side economics is all about.

The Tories have an appalling record as the party of production. Not even the editor of *The Sun*, who daily proves my dictum that in journalism there is no honour, would seek to deny the figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which show that, although industrial output rose by a piddling, paltry 10·3 per cent. in the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990 under the Tories, it rose by 27·5 per cent. in the United States and by 55·5 per cent. in Japan in the same period.

Listening to today's debate, it seems that the Tories' appalling record is made worse by the Chief Secretary's appalling ignorance of matters economic. In his intervention during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) today, he showed that he does not know the difference between industrial investment, manufacturing investment, and investment in plant and machinery, the latter of which includes new, empty office blocks. The problem is that "Swank", as the Chief Secretary has become known, brings to economics the mind of a second-rate lawyer. The idea of the Tories as good economic managers comes in the main from practised professional lawyers.

I have already mentioned Kelvin MacKenzie, the editor of *The Sun*. Close behind comes the editor of the *Evening Standard*. Last week, the *Evening Standard* wrote that, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, one in three people in London and the south-east would pay increased national insurance contributions under Labour. The truth is that the institute said no such thing. It was a whopping lie. On the basis of that complete fabrication, the *Evening Standard* printed screaming headlines with breathless stories underneath about Labour's tax and benefit polices being in disarray. Only those for whom lies are a way of life would seek to argue that tax and benefit changes which produce five times more winners than losers will be unpopular.

John Wycliffe once said:

"I believe that in the end the truth will conquer."

It will not if the editor of the *Evening Standard* has his way. When H. Agar wrote:

"The truth that makes men free is for the most part the truth which men prefer not to hear",

he might well have added, "and which the editor of the *Evening Standard*, backed by Swank and the Chancellor, prefers not to print."

Happily, we can turn to *The Times* to see just how incompetent the Tories are as economic managers. On 4 January, a letter appeared in its columns which dripped with arrogance and conceit and which exuded the unconscious realisation of the effortless superiority in economic matters of its author. It was the kind of letter that decently modest and reticent men would leave their wives and mistresses or their friends to write. It was written by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir. G. Howe).

When Professor Sidney Pollard, the distinguished economic historian, saw it over breakfast at his home in Sheffield, he almost choked on his cornflakes. Although not given to writing to newspapers, the professor grabbed for his pen. "This politician," he thought to himself, "is being worse than economical with the truth. He is a"—I cannot say the word, because it is unparliamentary.

Professor Pollard wrote in his reply that Sir Geoffrey had forgotten—how can one forget the very essence of one's being?—to mention that it was his first Budget with its massive Thatcherite transfer of the tax burden from the rich to the poor which raised the rate of inflation to the extent that the dramatic remedies he mentioned became a necessity. Professor Pollard then said that the much-lauded period of growth for seven years merely raised us back to the pit into which Sir Geoffrey's policies had brought the economy.

The growth rate for the whole period of Tory Government was well below that achieved from 1974-79. At the end of it, as Professor Pollard told readers of *The Times*, our economy was so weakened that it had to be put right by crude and cruel measures.

I will finish with Professor Pollard's epitaph to the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, which is a fitting epitaph to the Tory Government. Professor Pollard says:

"Being personally responsible for a policy which damaged the economy to an extent that even the sufferings of millions could not fully put right is bad enough: to boast about it thereafter is quite intolerable."

6.26 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): In a speech limited to 10 minutes, I will concentrate on the exchange rate mechanism, especially in light of paragraph 36 of the report by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on the autumn statement.

I share the Committee's concern about the effects of our membership of the ERM. The ERM is a central and crucial point in the great European debate. In essence, that debate is about power—how much or how little power we should surrender to survive as a developed country. The great European debate is about power—great power. Essentially, it is about German power and how best to cope with it. In coping with German power, there are basically two main approaches—that of Great Britain and that of France.

Great Britain is a net contributor to the European Economic Community. It has a 600-year-old democracy and it has successfully resisted German domination twice in the past century. In Britain, we intend to cope with German power by competition in a free market, but independently as a free nation. We in Britain believe in a Europe of free markets and free nations.

On the other hand, France—which, like most other members of the EEC, is a net recipient of EEC funds—has a relatively short history of democracy and has suffered a mauling and domination by Germany at least twice in the past century. The French approach appears to be to tie Germany down within Europe, like a modern Gulliver, and then to get closely into bed with Germany in the hope that Germany will be kind and will tend to favour France in the future. The French approach is to participate as a subservient friend of Germany in a market dominated by Germany, in the hope of future favours. Of course, people throughout Europe will ask: how much different is that from Vichy France?

In addition to that essential difference in political philosophy and approach, there are fundamental

[Mr. John Browne]

differences in economic structure between the United Kingdom and Germany. Let us make no mistake about it: the exchange rate mechanism is a halfway house to a single European currency. A single European currency, based on paper rather than on gold, will represent a single economy which in turn will be dominated by Germany.

The basic characteristics of the United Kingdom economy are that growth has been generated internally, that real rates of interest have always been low or even negative and that inflation has been tolerated to protect jobs, but the basic characteristics of the German economy are almost exactly 180 deg different. Growth has been externally generated, real rates of interest have been historically high and inflation has been tolerated only at a low rate or at zero.

To illustrate the crucial difference in attitudes towards inflation, let us remember today that our Government rightly claim a great sense of achievement in reducing inflation to its present level. In contrast, the Germans regard the very same rate of inflation as intolerable. Therefore, particularly on inflation, where do we meet?

The exchange rate mechanism is a halfway house to a single currency. It is a currency bloc dominated by the deutschmark. It reflects, in essence, the interests of the German economy. Within the exchange rate mechanism we see different interests. For example, the German transfer economies—countries such as Holland and Belgium—import, add value and export to Germany. Therefore, they feel little of the ill-effect of high German interest rates. Other economies, like those of France and Italy, are steadily being stifled by high interest rates within the ERM.

In our economy we have falling nominal rates of interest, but, as we have been told, inflation has been falling even faster than the nominal rate of interest. Therefore, real rates of interest—nominal, less inflation—are rising in the face of the worst recession in living memory. That has the effect of deepening our recession and causing even normally more prudent businesses to go into liquidation, even higher unemployment and even more mortgage foreclosures. High interest rates are encouraging higher savings and therefore less demand.

Our economy is crying out for lower interest rates, but our interest rates do not respond any more to our economic needs. Oh, no; thanks to our ERM membership, United Kingdom interest rates respond not to the needs of our economy but, through the ERM, to the needs of the German economy, which demands high interest rates in today's world. That surely must be economic nonsense. In the interests of our economy and the economies of other ERM members, interest rates must come down, just as they have done in the United States. The United States was free to bring its interest rates down so that, at the prime end, federal interest rates are negative by 25 basis points.

From within the ERM we must press for a reduction in German interest rates. If we fail in that, we must press the Germans to revalue the deutschmark, thus allowing other ERM domestic interest rates to fall. If we fail to achieve German co-operatoin and that goal, we must withdraw from the ERM without delay before we are forced to do so by trouble on the streets because of economic depression, not merely recession.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and others have criticised that advice. They say that the prime aim is to bring inflation under control, but what is "under control"? Is inflation under control if it is plummeting and falls below zero into negative rates? I believe that that is depression. Inflation is yesterday's battle. It may be tomorrow's battle yet again, but today the battle is to stimulate confidence in the economy. The longer we fail to achieve that, the worse will be our competitive position in the prosperity race of the next decade.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has a very difficult job. I do not underestimate it or his great efforts to achieve a sound, prudent economy, but I beg him to withdraw promptly from the exchange rate mechanism unless he is successful in negotiating either a reduction in deutschmark interest rates or a revaluation of the deutschmark, which would allow other members within the ERM to lower their domestic rates. In the absence of that assurance, I regret to have to tell my right hon. Friend that I cannot support his autumn statement.

6.35 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): The Chancellor's opening speech was a joke. Instead of addressing himself to his forecasts in the autumn statement and to why they were so far out, he decided instead to spend his time attacking Labour's proposals. He did that with all the venom of a Pekinese let off the lead. If the Chancellor had been a rain doctor and had forecast to the tribe that rain was coming as often as he forecast the end of the recession, all the tribe would have died of starvation. The Chancellor is the worst in a line of successive Tory Chancellors, all of whom have failed the nation and all of whom have added to the ruin of the economy.

What we have today is a recession. Those are not just my words. Every hon. Member who has spoken from the Government Benches has referred to the fact that the recession is biting, that interest rates are too high and that business and industry are being throttled. We are facing very difficult times. Under the Tory Government since 1979 unemployment has gone up 150 per cent. and is still rising.

There has been much discussion about investment and what is meant by manufacturing investment. Following the recession, or rather the slump, between 1979 and 1981 manufacturing investment took a long time to recover. It was 1988 before it recovered. We had investment in the mid-1980s; however, most of it did not go into manufacturing but into retail, finance and services—all worthy in themselves but not things which added to the competitiveness of manufacturing investment.

Manufacturing investment only regained its 1979 level in 1988. Once more, it is beginning to plummet. Hon. Members do not need to take my word for that or the word of any of my right hon. or hon. Friends. The CBI has forecast that manufacturing investment between 1989 and 1992 will fall by almost 25 per cent. If investment is falling, there is no way that manufacturing industry can be competitive with the rest of the world, particularly in the single European market.

That is the truth, and it is very grave. It is no use the Chancellor pretending that investments are up. He was

talking about all investment, of course. Manufacturing investment is going down, and, of course, manufacturing industry produced the wealth of this nation.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoyle: I should like to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I do not have much longer to speak.

Quite apart from investment, of course, we have the problem of what is happening to small employers. Business failures have increased by almost 61 per cent., yet the Conservative party pretends to be the friend of small employers. Nothing that the Chancellor or even Conservative Back-Bench Members have said will add to confidence. We have a lack of confidence at the moment. As many hon. Members have said, all sectors, whether retail, construction or manufacturing, are completely flat.

Another problem is the rate at which we entered the ERM. To hear Conservative Members talk, one would not think that the former Prime Minister and the present Prime Minister took us into the ERM at the wrong time, for all the wrong reasons, and at the wrong rate. One cannot go in at that rate, because British manufacturing industry cannot compete. The rate at which we went in was almost three——

Mr. John Browne: Hon. Members should also look at the Opposition Front Bench.

Mr. Hoyle: I am sorry, it was the ex-Prime Minister and the—*[Interruption.]* The Government took us in at that level and put us in the dilemma in which we must compete at an artificial rate. I wish that Conservative Members would accept their responsibility and turn their attention to the Prime Minister who said, "In no way will we change the rate that we are in."

Mr. Tim Smith *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hoyle: The hon. Gentleman keeps pointing. Why does he not apply pressure on the Prime Minister who took us into the ERM? I cannot understand the former Prime Minister——

Mr. John Browne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hoyle: I am sorry, but I cannot give way, much as I should like to do so. I have only three minutes left.

I cannot understand why the former Prime Minister is now objecting to our being in the ERM. She is the person who took us in. There is no doubt that, whichever party is in power, the Government will have to look at the realignment. It will have to be a fairly large realignment if we are to be competitive—that is, about 15 per cent.—and if we are to give back the competitive edge to industry, to have a recovery and to sustain that recovery.

We have plans in relation to providing incentives to manufacturing industry, and providing the incentives that the CBI has repeatedly asked the Government to give. We will give tax incentives for research and development. If we do not have research and development, our companies will not be in the forefront of those that bring forward new ideas. If we do not have new ideas, we will not be able to compete. Of course, we will opt for more training. Indeed, we will spend more on training. In addition, we will give real help to small businesses. We will get on with the task of revitalising the country. It will be a new start and it will give new hope, and new hope is certainly required.

It is no use the Chancellor or the Financial Secretary spending all their time attempting to attack Labour's plans. The electorate will want to know what successive Conservative Governments have been doing since 1979 to land us in such a mess—and we are in a mess. We are the only member of the European Community in recession. All other members are looking to growth, but we have negative growth of 2 per cent. That does not augur well for the future of this country. It means that, instead of things getting better under the present Government, things will get much worse, and that is even before we are in the single European market. There has certainly been no progress in developing an infrastructure and in encouraging companies to compete in that market. Of course that market will offer opportunities, but it will also lead to failures if one is not prepared for it. The Government have not prepared us for it.

Let us have a general election and let us have what the country needs and is crying for—a change of Government, and a Government who will get on with the task of proudly leading us into the next century. That Government can only be a Labour Government.

6.45 pm

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I think, although I am not absolutely sure, that this is the first time in 21 years in the House that I have spoken in an economic debate. I have in common with the Leader of the Opposition the fact that economics is not my scene.

The debate has three purposes. The first is to enable hon. Members to take part in some electioneering along the lines that we have heard from the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). The second is to discuss the overall economic strategy, and that is not what I feel qualified to do. The third purpose springs from the fact that the debate is just about halfway between the autumn statement and the Budget. The autumn statement and the accompanying material cover public expenditure and taxation. The two points that I shall raise are in the territory between the two.

My first point—both points are addressed to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary—is about one thing that we could do for small businesses in the present tough economic climate. We all know that the economic climate is tough—there is no point saying otherwise. I strongly urge my right hon. and hon Friends in the coming Budget to think hard about the possibility of some short-term relief from the unified business rate.

I am very struck that small business men whom I meet in my constituency and elsewhere say over and again that the UBR is causing them great difficulty. Of course, fundamentally, the lack of orders is the difficulty, but the UBR is a serious difficulty. It is pretty obvious that there is not much point in reducing corporation tax for people who are not actually paying corporation tax, whereas an immediate reduction in the UBR would be of great value.

That is a short-term measure to deal with the current situation. When the economic recovery comes, that measure could be dropped. I do not propose to say how it could be done; there are different ways of doing it. No doubt one way would be by stalling or even temporarily reversing the move to the level determined by revaluation. There is no doubt that the people who are feeling it most viciously in many parts of the country are those who are

[Sir Timothy Raison]

affected by the higher levels produced by revaluation in areas such as my own. The other way would be through some simple, straightforward cut. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will think very hard about the possibility of doing something.

The second matter also falls in the interstices between taxation and public expenditure. I wish to say a word about the proposals which are currently being floated in relation to the possibility of tax relief on child care for working mothers, or the alternative version, which is to provide a voucher for child care to working mothers.

We have already seen brought in some sort of tax relief for workplace nurseries. It is now being suggested that this should be extended to all day care, presumably where fees are actually being charged. It is designed to help mothers to go out to work—or perhaps, more strictly, to help when both parents are at work. I understand the pressure for it and many of my constituents would be rather pleased by it, but I have a good many doubts as to whether it is the right course to follow.

The idea of a tax allowance of this kind goes against the general philosophy or policy of reducing tax reliefs and allowances rather than multiplying them, a philosophy that I am very much in favour of.

There are obvious problems about the feasibility of schemes of this kind. Definition is bound to be complicated: defining exactly what is meant by day care or child care. The voucher version of this is also open to abuse; it could end up in pockets for which it was not designed. So there are practical problems.

Is there an economic case for such a measure? It depends very much where we are in the economic cycle. It is rather hard at present to argue that there is a strong case for measures to encourage more people, who are not in it at the moment, to enter the labour market. The problem at the moment is unemployment rather than over-full employment, so I cannot see a desperate need to lure back to work people who are uncertain whether they should be there.

If, however, there is an economic need, it has always seemed to me that the proper people to pay for it, to put it crudely, are not the taxpayers as a whole but the employers, the people who would gain the economic advantage. In logic, that is irrefutable.

Above all, it seems to me unfair that those who earn a second income should receive tax relief while those who stay at home to look after their children receive neither income nor tax relief. Not only is that not equitable; it seems questionable on social grounds. How far do we really want to persuade the parents of very young children to go out to work? Of course they should have the right to do so—I am absolutely in favour of that, and often it is the right decision, but in other cases it is the wrong decision. I cannot see that it should be part of public policy to go out of our way to encourage people to leave home as soon as possible, because we know that the needs of children are very great and that, by and large, their mothers are the best people to look after them when they are very young.

What emerges from this is that, fundamentally, the argument in favour of tax relief is not really about supporting or looking after children but about helping their parents, about making life a bit easier for their parents. In all this, we should look primarily at the interests of the children themselves. If we were to give tax relief or introduce a voucher system for child care, that itself would give no guarantee of quality in child care, something in which I am very interested.

When I was Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, I was active in producing a report which argued the case for the widest possible extension of nursery education, either in the public sector or the private sector. It should be not just glorified child-minding, but appropriate education of its kind. I would much rather see resources, if resources are deemed to be available, devoted to strengthening nursery education than to providing this particular tax relief.

I also believe that, if we feel that we are in a position to inject extra resources into this area, much the best way, on top of nursery education, is through an enhanced child benefit. It will be said that child benefit is not selective, but we all know very well that tax reliefs are not selective—or, if they are, that they are generally selective in favour of the better-off rather than the worse-off. So that is not a strong argument.

We should leave the choice of whether to go back to work to the parents themselves; the state should be neutral. I very much hope, therefore, that my right hon. Friends will not fall for the arguments which are being advanced with such fervour.

6.53 pm

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The autumn statement is a testimony to the programme of whatever Government are in office. What we have here and what we have seen with the Government over the years is a waste of £100 billion from North sea oil and a waste of £10 billion with the poll tax. That is testimony indeed. When I hear bandied around the Chamber phrases such as those that we heard today, the one that comes most to mind is: "If it's not hurting, it's not working." I assure Conservative Members that in my constituency, where unemployment is very high, it is hurting and it is not working.

If we look at the testimony of the Government's record on investment and manufacturing, we see some interesting figures. I have managed to dig them up today by means of the Library. Investment in manufacturing was £12·4 billion in 1989 and £12·4 billion in 1990, but in 1991 it came down to £9·4 billion, a reduction of 30 per cent. In the 12 years since 1979, manufacturing investment rose by 52 per cent. in France, 48 per cent. in Germany and 54 per cent. in Europe as a whole, yet in Britain it has fallen in real terms.

Our manufacturing industry has been slashed to a minimum. At one time there were many millions of people working in manufacturing industry; today there are only 5 million. It is an absolute disgrace. It is again testimony to the Government and their so-called economic miracle. When people heard about it a few years ago, they were on the crest of a wave and thought that we had one of the best Governments in living memory, but we are now paying the price.

Business investment in Germany is rising by 7 per cent., in Spain by 5 per cent. and in Japan by 7 per cent. According to the Confederation of British Industry—not any Opposition Member—investment in Britain is falling by 11 per cent., so the CBI is telling the Government that their investment has been nothing to shout about.

Business failures are even worse. Let us look at the record. In 1980 when the Conservative party had just come to power, there were 10,651 business failures; in 1991 the figure was 47,777—another testimony to the hopelessness of the Government. The growth rate under this Government has been 1·75 per cent.—lower than under any other post-war Government. The Government have the worst record since the war. Gross domestic product fell by 2·3 per cent. in 1990, while that of Germany grew by 1·9 per cent., of France by 1·2 per cent. and of Italy by 1·4 per cent. Britain is indeed the poor man of Europe.

Manufacturing output growth in the United Kingdom between 1979 and 1991 was the lowest of all the countries in the European Economic Community, except for Greece where it was just 1 per cent. lower than in the United Kingdom.

Last year, in the north, there were 3,730 business failures—an increase of 57 per cent. on 1990. When I looked at the position in the south-east, I felt that the north's figure was not too bad because the figure for the south-east was 9,722. Then I looked at the position in the south-west, because that is where all the Tory Members are. No wonder they are not here tonight. No wonder the Government cannot find speakers for the debate. According to last year's figures, there were 5,401 business failures in the south-west.

The figure for London is even worse, but that is where the Tories hope to gain some seats to win overall control. According to last year's figures, there were 7,731 business failures in London. That is an absolute disgrace. The Government are hoodwinking people in those areas. I hope that one day those people will realise what the Government are all about. The Government are for themselves; for the rich and for anyone who wants to put something in the coffers of Conservative central office. According to last year's figures, 200 firms a day went under.

Since 1979, unemployment in the north has increased by 39 per cent. in real terms. It has increased from 93,000 in 1979, when the Conservatives came to power, to 129,000. More than 31 per cent. of unemployed people in the north-east are under 25. Fortunately for us, there are Labour Members in the north-east. There are also one or two Conservative Members, but the figures which I recounted will ensure that they are defeated at the next election. Given the figures which I just described, I hope that Conservative Members will also be defeated in the south-east.

Thirty-three per cent. of people in the north-east have been out of work for more than a year. That is intolerable. It is no good the Government telling us, as they tried to tell us today, that everything is hunky-dory and that the recession has bottomed out. According to the 1991 figures, there were 80,000 house repossessions in England, Wales and Scotland. That was a 90 per cent. increase over the 1990 figure. That is the Government's testimony. Mortgage arrears are now at record levels and one in 12 people are two months behind with their mortgage repayments.

In respect of taxation, the Tories believe that their party gives everything away and takes nothing back. Unfortunately, that is wrong. When Labour came to power, VAT was 8 per cent. As we all know, under the Tories today, VAT is 17·5 per cent. That has caused problems for working people, because VAT applies to everyone and not simply to the rich. It applies to the low-paid man who has to buy clothes for his children.

Mr. Tim Smith: Value added tax does not apply to children's clothes.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman is right; I apologise.

In the last Budget, VAT meant an extra £2 for the average working family. The increase in alcohol duty meant an extra £1 on that family's budget. The tax increase on tobacco in the last Budget meant £1 a week for the average working man. Changes to petrol duty meant an extra 30p a week for the average working man—not many average working men have motor cars, not like some of us in this place who are very rich. In all, last year's Budget meant an increase of £4·30 in taxation for the average working man. It is a fallacy that the Government are not a Government of taxation. They should get out and let another Government come in and do the right thing for the working class of this country.

7.4 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): It is already crystal clear from this debate and from the official Opposition amendment that, if the Labour party was ever to form the Government, this country would have to spend more, tax more and borrow more. That would be quantitatively and qualitatively far more than if this Conservative Government were to remain in power.

It is also misleading for the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and his colleagues to present Labour's programme as cautious and carefully costed. They must know, just as we know, that it is the cost of a Labour Government over a full five-year term which would concern the British people. That cost would be well in excess—perhaps more than £30 billion in excess—of the Government's current spending plans, which are already based on some pretty optimistic assumptions about future growth in the economy over the relevant period.

The Labour party has sought to lull the British people into a false sense of security by referring only to the first year's cost of its promised increases in state pensions and child benefits. However, any fair-minded observer is bound to conclude, on the basis of previous evidence of the Labour party in office, that there are usually three stages in a typical Labour path to perdition: first, Labour spends more in an effort to redeem its pledges to special interest groups—and it is very close to many producer groups; then it taxes more, whether via income tax or national insurance, in an attempt to cover at least some of that cost; then it borrows more and has to raise interest rates higher than they would otherwise have been until the markets or the International Monetary Fund—possibly both—intervene to stop Labour. That all ends in tears.

We saw all that before, between October 1974 and October 1976. If the British people were foolish enough to return a Labour Government once more, we would see it again. The bills to the taxpayer may be delayed somewhat under the formulae espoused by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, but they would all be in the post—as the saying goes—even if, under Labour, that would be a pretty inferior second-class post.

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

Furthermore, in a modern society such as ours, Labour would soon encounter a taxpayers' revolt if it pursued its irresponsible public spending plans. Notwithstanding all the adult education that Labour Members have received during their long years in opposition, they do not seem to have learnt that large and rapid increases in public spending are not the most efficient way to meet genuine social needs or to get maximum value for money in the public sector. Too much of an extra spend of that kind tends to be absorbed in a rapid pay increase.

Labour's redistributive politics—the politics of envy as it was once called—would involve robbing middle-class Peter to provide services for middle-class Paul. Indeed, because of the pattern of use in many public services, it would often be a case of increasing tax on the relatively lower-paid in work, or national insurance contributions, to increase pay in the public sector and provide services which the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—who, alas, is not in the Chamber today—and others have shown are secured disproportionately by what the hon. Member has described as the "sharp elbows" of the middle class.

The wrong way in which to promote an investment-led recovery, which is precisely the objective in the Opposition's amendment, is to pursue policies that would raise interest rates, increase taxation and national insurance and weaken market confidence in the currency. However, those would be the consequences of Labour's high-spending and high taxation policies.

The Opposition's amendment refers to other desirable measures, such as those designed to promote education and training, but they are medium to long-term measures. They would have no positive impact during the current phase of economic recession. In any case, the private sector has commendably continued with its expenditure on human capital throughout the recession in a way that it did not do in the last recession. However, private firms do not want the prospect of a statutory training levy, something that they would get from a Labour Government, which would be rigid and unfair and would add to their costs.

Against that background, the autumn statement is a worthy document which catalogues the Government's commitment to increase public spending in our priority areas—for example, the national health service. However, the obligatory forecasting duty that the Industry Act 1975 imposes leads to some forecasts that are more than usually inaccurate—for example, forecasts about the pace and scale of economic recovery, and especially about the turnaround in consumer expenditure and fixed investment. I regard this as a pity, because it may have served to raise among the public some hopes whose fulfilment now seems destined to be deferred.

However, there is good news in the autumn statement. Much of this should breed confidence that the recovery, when it does come, will be soundly based and sustainable. For example, consumer price increases have halved since their peak last year, unit labour cost increases have halved since their peak last year, and sterling remains securely within its agreed ERM bands. I believe that, on this basis, we can be confident that the coming year will see the beginnings of recovery after what may turn out to have been the longest and deepest recession of the post-war period.

Incidentally, we should not really have been surprised at the extent of the recession, as the downturn is not confined to this country. But, primarily, the boom that preceded the downturn was also the longest and strongest period of continuous economic growth in this country since the 1930s. These experiences have obviously had their behavioural and psychological effects in both phases of the economic cycle.

Against that background, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was right when he said in the House last week that reduced inflation is absolutely the first condition for medium-term prosperity. Having heard his speech today, I am confident that he will stick to his view into and beyond the next election. He was also right, in a recent *Financial Times* interview, to reject the temptation to buy votes in the election period. Only an irresponsible Government would seek to do that. It would be completely wrong for my right hon. Friends even to contemplate such action—not least because Conservatives intend in the next Parliament to inherit the consequences of current policy decisions.

7.12 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): At the time of the autumn statement, I asked the Chancellor whether it did not represent a decisive shift from the concept of balanced budgets. He replied that he intended to balance the budget over the cycle. Since he uttered those words, I have given some thought to them, but have not yet been able to figure out what period of years, from inflation to deflation to inflation, he was talking about.

I have not been able to figure out whether the right hon. Gentleman intended to retain the same burden of debt over a very long period—perhaps permanently—and whether that burden would be in cash terms or real terms or would be expressed as a percentage of gross national product, or whatever. I hope that the Front-Bench spokesman, if he is unable to give me the information tonight, will have the courtesy to write and let me know what maintaining a balance over the cycle means. Quite a number of people will be interested to hear.

I should like to know whether the current Administration or their predecessors ever intended to diminish central Government debt, or even the entire public-sector debt, as a matter of policy, or whether the diminution was simply the result of a happy accident that occurred because they got their sums wrong. Governments seem to be very good at getting their sums wrong. In the very rumbustious electioneering speeches that we have heard from the two Front Benches and from some other Members today, there was some evidence of that. As neither of the major parties will make any impact in the election in Northern Ireland, I can take a more casual, and perhaps a more objective, view and can state what very many people in the country are thinking.

The Government did not only get their sums wrong in relation to the whole United Kingdom; they got their sums wrong over Government expenditure in Northern Ireland in the current year. But there is something that annoyed some of us even more. When, some weeks ago, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced the moratorium on certain aspects of public expenditure in Northern Ireland, he did not have the guts to do so in the

House. I do not wish to be impolite, but I must point out that it was in reply to a planted question that he told us that the Government were at least considering the matter.

That was followed up with a statement that the overspend of about £30 million had been identified by early December, that it represented 0·5 per cent. of the Northern Ireland block grant, and that the right hon. Gentleman intended to correct what was amiss. The 0·5 per cent. does not seem very much. Given the magnitude of the mistakes that have been described in almost all speeches today, there could very easily be an underspend of 0·5 per cent., or even 2 or 3 per cent. That being the case, I wonder whether the corrective measure is somewhat premature.

Even worse is the fact that the Government's first excuse for this moratorium in Northern Ireland expenditure was the high cost of compensation for damage and injury caused by terrorist activity. That was the most foolish of remarks. Everyone in Northern Ireland knows that bills arising from terrorist damage do not come in during the financial year in which the damage occurs. The great bulk are received the following year, and sometimes even later. The sums that have been set out for future years seem to suggest that the Government do not expect to conquer the terrorists in the near future.

When, in this case, the Government were blown off course, they had to come up with some other excuses. The real problem is simply that they got their sums wrong, and they do not yet know where the moratorium and the cut will fall. When I put a question about this matter, the Secretary of State had to say that he did not know. He did not say it quite so baldly, but that is what he meant. He said that the changes would be laid before the House in February.

Well, we look forward to February, but when we receive the figures, we shall have to search through the whole mass of detail and make comparisons with the previously published figures to work out exactly where things went wrong. The Government would have been rather more honest if, at the beginning, they had regarded this as a contingency matter—it arose out of terrorist activity—and had decided that the sums required should be provided out of the United Kingdom contingency fund. That is what would happen in respect of any other part of the United Kingdom.

On the national scene, the Government are confronted with a rising budget deficit. The Chancellor now finds himself with a fixed exchange rate. I remember the joy that was demonstrated in this place when we were told that we were to go over to a floating exchange rate. Sometimes I wonder how long the Government stayed with the floating exchange rate. However, they have decided to move to the fixed exchange rate, and the whole economy of the nation is at the mercy of an arbitrary standard that the Chancellor of the Exchequer cannot control.

I feel sure that the Chancellor—whoever he may be—will find the role of a supplicant at European summits very humiliating. Perhaps it will be good for the soul—which, in this case, certainly requires some purification. The Chancellor has no control whatever over interest rates. Would any hon. Member deny that the Chancellor would be overjoyed if he once more had the capacity to reduce interest rates and manage the economy of the nation? After all, that is what he was elected to do. I feel very sad that he has thrown that power away, and I hope to live to see the day when it is restored.

The right hon. Gentleman's alternatives are few. I believe that, very soon, he will find himself in the position of his predecessors, who had to wrestle with fixed exchange rates. I believe that he will be forced, through this wonderful economic cycle, to create inflation or to deflate according to whether the value of the currency is rising or falling. It is not a prospect that any Chancellor would welcome, but it is one with which the present Government have chosen to live.

The problem is that that will continue until we either leave the ERM or become part of a federal Europe with one currency and, inevitably, one budget. When Europe reaches that stage—and I hope that we are not still part of it—that currency will float. It will be bought and sold on the world currency markets because that is the only way in which its true value can be found. If the Chancellor is prepared to deny that that currency will float, I should like to hear him say so. I do not think that I will hear it this evening.

Two minor matters also concern me. Perhaps they are not that minor because they have been the making and the breaking of many a person's fortune. They have cost people their businesses, their dwellings and their incomes. The first is the problems that small businesses face because of the high level of bank rates and the horrendous activities of the banks.

When a business is in trouble and its owner goes to the bank and explains the problem, instead of being sympathetic, the bank says, "You are a risk," and bangs another 3 or 4 per cent. on to the interest rate. We have heard a great deal about caring banks—but from the banks themselves, not from business men or people who owe them money. By putting up the interest rate, the bank ensures that the business goes under and the jobs of its employees are lost.

The second point is the high level of rates being charged on retail premises. It appears to many of us, and especially the retailers, that, every time another few quid has to be found for the local economy, the attitude is, "Get it from retail business." It does not matter whether it be central Government or a local authority, that is the attitude, and it has led to the destruction of many small businesses—the very group the Government say they rely on and want to encourage.

7.21 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). In so much of what he says he shows the fundamental agreement that there has always been between the Tory party and the Ulster Unionists. He makes us realise how many mistakes have been made by successive Tory Governments and how easy it is to understand the despair and resentment felt towards us by many Ulster Unionists. I hope that he and they understand that there are many on the Conservative Benches who have noted those mistakes and who, across the barrier of resentment and misunderstanding, feel strong affection and admiration for our cousins in the Province.

I listened with care to the two opening speeches. I was reminded of the agreeable battles—and "agreeable" is the right adjective—that used to take place in the 1970s between Lord Whitelaw and Lord Jenkins, as they have now become, when they discussed home affairs. Lord Jenkins treated Lord Whitelaw with that urbane

[Mr. Nicholas Budgen]

condescension for which he was rightly known, and Lord Whitelaw—with genial good will—accepted the role made for him by Lord Jenkins. Both of them were united in the view that it was crude, vulgar and against the public interest to say anything about immigration, which at that time was a subject of some interest to the public. Such vulgarity was avoided in all discussions of home affairs.

The position is similar today. The two Front-Bench spokesmen, who are now carrying out the economic policy of the Bundesbank, did not for a moment allow the words "exchange rate mechanism" to pass their lips. It was left to later and more vulgar speakers to mention those words. My hon. Friends the Members for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and for Winchester (Mr. Browne) put the fundamental and first arguments against ERM with great force and clarity.

It is interesting that we are now debating these matters in the shadow of the great intellect of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). After all, he was the single most important politician of the period between 1974 and his resignation, because economic policy decides so much in our political affairs. Between 1974 and 1979, he helped us to understand the three most important factors that would guide Tory economic policy between 1979 and 1985. They were, first, that there would be a decline in the increase in money supply; secondly, that there would be floating exchange rates; and thirdly, that, as far as possible, we should aim for fiscal neutrality. It is one of the great tragedies of the Tory party that he who understood everything was, perhaps, less strong in belief.

In 1985, my right hon. Friend went to a great conference—the new field of the cloth of gold—which was a meeting of the G5 at Plaza. He went along with what was then the new American fashion of interfering with exchange rates. No doubt, having been persuaded that it would be of temporary advantage, he persuaded my right hon. Friend the then Prime Minister—who was not immune to the charms of American persuasion—that if the Americans wanted it, it must be good for Britain. The then Prime Minister went against what had been the firm convictions of the Tory party for the whole of the period since the agony of it, having so unnecessarily lost power in 1974.

From starting to rig exchange rates, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby then laid the ground for those who wanted to go into the ERM and to move from fixed and variable rates to fixed rates. The consequence of that was that in 1985 he did not merely undermine the argument for a floating exchange rate; he undermined the argument for the medium-term financial strategy and also, in the end, the argument for fiscal neutrality.

It is important that my right hon. and hon. Friends who may be saying to themselves, "There is a risk that we might lose the election", know that if we do lose it, in the end it will be because of what happened at Plaza in 1985, which ended up with Britain joining the ERM. We abandoned the three tenets of a highly successful Tory policy as it was applied between 1979 and 1985.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will note some of the consequences of the abandonment of those policies. Let us consider the consequences of having what, in practical terms, is a fixed exchange rate. The first is the political consequence. Anybody who has read, thought about or experienced in close circumstances the period of the Callaghan-Wilson devaluation knows what happened. It is a constitutional necessity for the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day to keep saying, "There will be no change in the value of the currency." He goes on saying, "We shall defend the currency to the last man and to the last drop of blood", but suddenly it changes and not only does the Chancellor have to resign but the Government of the day suffer a considerable political setback as a consequence of having said so much that requires the eating of words.

It also becomes clear that intervention—no matter by how many Governments—is not enough to stand against market forces. Governments then come to the conclusion that they very much dislike using the interest rate weapon when it is so obviously at variance with domestic needs. So what happens? They do things such as reimposing exchange controls. Let us remember that when the Tory Administration abolished exchange controls in 1979, they did so in the belief that they would always be supporting floating exchange rates. Exchange controls are extremely useful with either a variable or a fixed exchange rate.

It will not be long before people start advocating exchange controls, which will considerably affect the viability of the City of London. And it will not stop there —if one has to have a fixed exchange rate, one can no longer remain neutral between exports and imports. We shall be back to import surcharges and to saying that imports are wicked and that exports are morally good. It is highly likely that we shall find that the new privatised arrangements for export credit guarantees are deficient. We shall have to have some system of state subsidy for exports.

All those distortions will inevitably flow from having abandoned those three important tenets that we worked so strongly and so well towards in our difficult period in opposition between 1974 and 1979. But it will not end there. Indeed, it is obvious that it has not ended yet. In my opinion, the system of fiscal neutrality was a good one. Most of all, it said that politicians should not decide who has the tax breaks and that, on the whole, that should be left to the market and we should have low taxes and few tax breaks. If we abandon the principle of fiscal neutrality, we lay ourselves open to every interest group and to every section of the community that can get support from a grouping of Members of Parliament or others who want some special deal.

I regret the way in which in 1985 we abandoned so much that was so successful. I hope that the Tory party will soon reconsider the advantages of so much that was so good between 1979 and 1985.

7.32 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): It is only two months since the Chancellor presented his autumn statement with all its false economic optimism. The period since then has been characterised by short-term electioneering tactics. It seems that the Government's whole approach is now to appeal to the presumed amnesia of the British people about what has actually happened during the past 13 years and then to deny any responsibility for it.

Week by week, another proposed quick fix leaks out from the Government—another spurt of spending for power with a short-term election-winning adjustment. Was not an example today's rumour that the 20 per cent.

mandatory poll tax may go, although only two months ago all Conservative Members voted to retain it? That strategy is based on a short memory and on the hope that everyone will forget that this is the Government who were elected in 1987 on a manifesto that never even mentioned the poll tax—an experiment that has cost thousands of millions of pounds of public money. The Conservative manifesto never even mentioned that VAT would be pushed up from 8 per cent. right through to 15 per cent. and this year to even 17·5 per cent. That manifesto never even mentioned that child benefit would be frozen solid for three years or that pensioners' incomes would be undermined by reductions in housing benefit. The Conservative manifesto never even mentioned that cuts in income support would lead to homelessness among youngsters.

It is worth recalling that in 1979 child benefit was 7 per cent. of average earnings. It is now worth only 4·8 per cent. In 1979 social security benefits, such as sickness benefit, were worth 29·2 per cent. of average earnings, but are now worth only 20 per cent. The Government were elected in 1979 on the basis of getting unemployment below its previous level, but they have had to make 30 alterations to the way in which the official figures are calculated. Yet under the Tories, since 1979, unemployment has never been lower than the figure that they inherited then, which was 1·08 million people, or 4 per cent. of the work force. It is worth recalling that in 1979 unemployment benefit was 29·2 per cent. of average earnings, but is now only 20·9 per cent. That is the real price that people in our society are having to pay for the Tory Government's economic con tricks over the past 13 years.

The Prime Minister told us to pretend that what is happening is a form of sadistic tonic, saying, "If it isn't hurting, it isn't working", but the many who are not working have had their lives effectively broken by the Government. For millions of people in our society these have been 13 years of economic pain, and that economic pain has been because of a deliberate Government policy. They have been quite conscious and deliberate in their experimental attempts to solve the economic crisis that they created by shifting Britain in the last decade to being a vulnerable, low-wage economy.

When Conservative Members talk about such things now, they say that they cannot improve things overnight. They pretend that they have just taken over and that the Prime Minister inherited a mess for which he is not responsible, yet that same man has been both Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. The economic mess and the illusion that one can both cut taxes and increase public spending is of the Government's conscious making. Conservative Members voted night after night in the House to set that policy in place.

The Government are trying to create the illusion of increasing public spending while cutting taxes, but not only has the overall burden of taxation been increased from 34·7 per cent. in 1979 to 37 per cent. now, so that the tax burden for a typical family with two children has increased by 13 per cent. since the years 1978-79, but the Government have effectively cut public spending on the national health service, education and training, and on housing in particular. In 1987, the pre-election bribe in the autumn statement that preceded the election was the promise of an increase in public spending over the next three years of £11·2 billion above and beyond the amount that was needed to make up for expected inflation. However, there was no increase whatsoever. There was a cut of £12·7 billion. That was the way in which that promise was fulfilled.

When the Prime Minister was asked on "The Frost Programme" on Sunday whether VAT would increase under the Conservatives if they were re-elected, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"We have no plans for an increase in VAT."

I seem to remember that that is exactly what the former Prime Minister said in 1979, in 1983 and in 1987, and she subsequently increased VAT. It seems that the promise further to cut income tax has been suspended from today's speeches but it might be a better idea for the Chancellor to come to the House to say that he will cut the 20 per cent. mandatory poll tax payment because that is one of the measures that has hit hardest the poorest in our society.

We need to bear in mind exactly who is paying the price for the Government's decisions. Primarily, it has been the unemployed. In the past year, unemployment has soared to 2·5 million—mainly young people—with the biggest annual rise since 1980. A total of 703,000 people joined the dole queue in 1991. Last month saw a 31,100 rise, bringing the total to 2·5 million people, or 9 per cent. of the working population. That was the worst rise since the first year of the Thatcher Government when in 1979-80 the total number of unemployed rocketed by 738,000 to 1·8 million people. That was what happened under a Government who were elected on a pledge to reduce unemployment, and in the 13 years since then unemployment has never been at a level lower than it was in 1979. Each registered job vacancy is now being chased by 23 unemployed people. That is the real, personal tragedy—a tragedy of lives blighted by the lack of work and purpose. Those people are certainly paying the price for the Government's misguided, short-term economic experiment.

As the trends continue, millions of people begin to feel that they are only a pay cheque away from the dole queue. For every extra 1,000 unemployed, social security spending is increased by £300 million. That is the real waste. Worse, 11 separate cuts in unemployment benefit have saved the Government between £5 billion and £6 billion.

In my constituency, while the unemployed poor pay the price, those in work face a future of low investment and low output under the Government's current economic strategy. Since 1979, the Government have almost seen off manufacturing industry: Britain is now the only EC country in which manufacturing investment is lower than it was in 1979. According to a detailed survey carried out by the Amalgamated Engineering Union, 170,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing industry last year, and 22,000 were lost between October and December. Since the completion of that survey, a further 3,500 jobs have gone. My region, Yorkshire, is highlighted as one of the worst hit.

Paradoxically, the United Kingdom is the second largest world owner of multinational assets. Its economy has been starved of capital investment, as—paradoxically again—the increase in part-time work demonstrates. The country is crying out for Labour's manufacturing investment initiative, which would bring enhanced first-year capital allowances for investment in plant and machinery, innovation and design. That is why we need a strong regional policy, to tackle the divide that is the legacy of the Government's strategy.

[Mr. John Battle]

It is not only the unemployed who have been forced to pay the price. An estimated 10 million people on the poverty level have suffered real cuts in income since 1979, while 1 per cent. of the population—more than half a million adults with the lowest incomes of all—have experienced a cut of no less than 22·6 per cent. in living standards, in real terms. As Ministers go around the world advertising Britain's special economic advantage of low labour costs, it should be remembered that a further 10 million people—those earning less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold of £5·15 an hour—are also paying the price of the Government's policies, and paying it every week.

There has been a massive income shift from the poorest third of the population to the better-off two thirds—and, above all, to those who are genuinely rich by any standards. The homeless, too, are helping to pay the price of that shift. Every "light at the end of the tunnel" forecast by the Government seems to be yet another oncoming train. The only chance now seems to be a general election, which would offer the people some hope for the future —the hope that a Labour Government is elected.

7.42 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): As is so often the case, the real debate about economic policy has taken place almost exclusively on the Conservative Benches. Labour Members have produced a torrent of statistics, but they have given us little in the way of constructive alternative policy. The speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was even more notable than his previous speeches for the paucity of policy proposals that it contained.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) has just told us of his wish for enhanced capital allowances, which he believes would lead to increased investment. Although, in the late 1970s, such allowances may have led to an increase in the quantity of investment, they distorted economic decisions: investment decisions are made for tax reasons rather than on their merits, and the quality of investment was affected.

Even if such a policy proved successful, it would be counterbalanced by another policy—the policy of increasing tax on savings. How can a party that proposes policies to encourage investment also propose policies to increase savings taxes? How can that encourage people to save, and therefore to invest?

I have listened carefully to my hon. Friends—especially my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), for Winchester (Mr. Browne) and for Bridlington (Mr. Townend). My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, in particular, seemed very complacent about the prospects for inflation. The great advantage of our membership of the exchange rate mechanism is not that it will lead to a reduction in inflation —although that has already happened—but that it will ensure that inflation is kept down. On too many occasions in the past, we have succeeded in getting inflation down, only to let it rise again, thus throwing away the benefits of a successful policy.

It is only 15 months since we decided to join the ERM, and that policy is widely supported in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West is one of the few Members who criticised the Government's monetary policy at the appropriate time, in 1987 and 1988. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East called for further interest rate reductions when interest rates were running at 7·5 per cent.

Mr. Favell: Here speaks an hon. Member who was not at all happy about ERM entry. My hon. Friend says that he believes that the ERM will keep inflation down; but, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was Chancellor and our currency was shadowing the deutschmark, we had to reduce interest rates to such a level that inflation took off. How would my hon. Friend ensure that we do not have to reduce them to the same level while we are in the ERM straitjacket?

Mr. Smith: With economic policy, it is necessary to go either forward or back, and my hon. Friend wants to go back—he wants to withdraw from the exchange rate mechanism. I think that we must soon move on—that is, move into the narrow ERM bands and thence, soon, to a single currency. It is vital for us to "progress" the policy.

Mr. Budgen: Surely the problem is the fact that we are now in an unstable, intermediate period. There is a case for the policies that I suggested, and there may be a case for a single currency according to those who believe that there is such a thing as a European nation.

Mr. Smith: There is something in what my hon. Friend says, but I feel that he sometimes underestimates the value of exchange rate stability to those in business. That is why the CBI is so enthusiastic about Britain's ERM membership: a business man who is trying to plan ahead will need some indication of the future level of inflation, interest rates and exchange rates. It is very difficult to carry out either import or export business if exchange rates are fluctuating like a yo-yo. That is why I think that the policy will bring about long-term benefits—although I understand how frustrating it is for some people that we cannot lower interest rates in the way that they would like.

The United States, after all, has reduced interest rates substantially, but as yet it has experienced no economic recovery. I think that people's main concern is less about the level of interest rates than about the level of debt, which is unaffected by the level of interest rates. Like people in the United Kingdom, they are concerned about the debt that built up in the late 1980s, and they want to repay some of it.

In the long term, that is good news: the savings ratio is holding up well, which means more money for investment. It is good that people are repaying their debt, although in the short term an increase in consumer spending would be desirable. It is extraordinary that, in the present circumstances, Labour should propose an increase in taxes on savings. We want to encourage people to save, so that there is more money for investment.

I think that the autumn statement had it about right. A substantial increase in public spending—an increase of some £11 billion—is proposed for next year. Labour would like to increase spending further—much further, no doubt. My right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary has costed all Labour's proposals, and they total £37 billion. *[Interruption.]* Very well. Let us look at the interesting table on page 27 of the autumn statement which shows the record of public spending from 1963-64 onwards. In the first and second years of the last Labour

Government, public spending increased hugely. As a proportion of gross domestic product it rose from 41 to 49 per cent. in just two or three years. That is what would happen if another Labour Government were elected.

There is another side to this question. It illustrates why people do not believe what the Labour party says about taxation. On 26 March 1974, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) introduced his first Budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He said:

"Finally, I turn to the rates of income tax . . . I require to raise from the taxpayer a substantial amount of additional revenue for the coming year . . . I propose to increase the basic rate of income tax by 3p in the pound."—[*Official Report*, 26 March 1974; Vol. 871, c. 325.]

The rate was 30p; it was increased to 33p. There was no mention of that in the Labour manifesto of February 1974. There will be no mention in Labour's 1992 manifesto of an increase in income tax. However, the poll published in *The Sunday Times* shows that most Labour Members of Parliament want income tax rates to be increased.

It happened again. On 15 April 1975, the right hon. Member for Leeds, East introduced his third Budget and said:

"I therefore have no alternative but to raise the income tax . . . My proposal is to raise the basic and higher rates of income tax by 2 percentage points".—[*Official Report*, 15 April 1975; Vol. 890, c. 317.]

On that occasion, the standard rate of income tax was raised to 35 per cent. Again, there was no mention of that proposal in the Labour manifesto of October 1974. Labour did it before. It will do it again.

7.51 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): According to the Prime Minister, there are an awful lot of dismal Jimmies, as he called them, about. With the exception of just two Conservative Back Benchers, every Conservative Back Bencher agrees that there has been a recession, a depression or a slump. The last one to disagree with that proposition, the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), was, I think, given a job to do. That may have satisfied him, because he is patently trying to get a job in Government.

I take no pleasure in agreeing with most Conservative Back Benchers that the British economy is in a deep and damaging recession. Far from there being a recovery, which Ministers have told us over and over again is about to happen, the British economy is still in the middle of a severe recession. There is talk of a plunge down again—the so-called double-dip recession.

Unemployment increased by 31,000 in December, bringing total unemployment up to 2·54 million, a rise of over 800,000 in the last year alone. Output, if North sea oil is excluded, was down again in the third quarter of 1991—the fourth consecutive quarter that output was down. Repossessions are running at 300 each working day. Business failures were running at 200 each working day in the last quarter. Consumer confidence is down. Business confidence is also plunging. The latest Confederation of British Industry survey shows that there is no expectation of a pick-up in the distributive trades.

Faced with all those signs, what did the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Prime Minister's right-hand man, do? He has done absolutely nothing to help the economy. Throughout the time that he has been Chancellor he has been complacent. His predecessor as Chancellor, the present Prime Minister, said:

"I do not myself believe that a recession is likely or necessary."

When the present Chancellor realised that that statement was untenable, he switched to saying that the recession would be painless. On 5 December 1990, he told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee:

"I think there are reasons why one could believe that it will be relatively short-lived and relatively shallow."

When that no longer held water, the rhetoric switched swiftly to talk of an imminent recovery. In his 1991 Budget speech he said that there were good reasons to expect that the recovery would begin in the second half of the year. In the following month he told everybody, amazingly, that economic recovery was around the corner.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield had the cheek to tell us that no one believes us. The Prime Minister added to the nonsense by saying in April 1991 that Britain's position was strengthening month by month. I could refer to many other remarks which have been made which show the complacency of the Prime Minister or, if I were to be more frank, his incompetence and that of the Chancellor in failing to realise the serious state that this country is in and to do something about it.

We have referred frequently in this debate to the Prime Minister's heartless statement that, if it is not hurting, it is not working. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not like the truth. The Prime Minister's statement showed that he personally was all right. Despite all his whining and moaning about the hardship of his early life, he cares nothing for the people who face the consequences of his economic policies.

The Prime Minister tries to blame Britain's economic woes on a massive worldwide recession. He would have us believe that the recession has nothing to do with him or the Chancellor. The Prime Minister was, however, Chancellor of the Exchequer. He has therefore tried to distance himself from the economic mess in which we find ourselves. The present Chancellor of the Exchequer has been a Treasury Minister since 1986 and a member of the Cabinet since 1989. Between 1987 and 1989 the Prime Minister was second in command to the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) when he was Chancellor and he was also a member of the Cabinet. Then he became Chancellor of the Exchequer before he was appointed Prime Minister. Therefore, the present Chancellor and Prime Minister helped to plan the top rate tax cuts of 1988 that fuelled the credit boom.

The Chancellor and the Prime Minister told us of the economic miracle that meant that we would have boom times for ever and that people should not hesitate to take on more debt. All of us could give instances of credit being made readily available; people could take on any amount of debt. That was disgraceful, given the misery that it caused. No other country is in such dire straits. The current recession was brought about by the present incumbents of Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street.

Britain was the first major country to go into recession. It has had the deepest recession and, if one considers current form, it may be the last country to come out of the recession. The only other countries within the European Community or the Group of Seven that have experienced serious declines in output in recent times are the United States and Canada. In each case, the fall was smaller than in the United Kingdom.

It is totally misleading to suggest that all countries are facing surging unemployment. The damage done by the

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Government to my part of Scotland was illustrated again when British Steel decided to close Ravenscraig. My constituency borders on Ravenscraig. Many of my constituents work there. The closure of Ravenscraig will affect them but, to quote the Prime Minister again, if it is not hurting it is not working. Again, though, he is not the one who is getting hurt.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield referred to Labour's programme and said that it would cost £35 billion. In *The Daily Telegraph* today—a newspaper that does not usually support the Labour party—its city editor says:

"Conservatives, you remember, are the people who are pledged to cut taxes; so they have, if the only tax that matters is income tax. But other tax rates, notably Value Added Tax, have doubled since and the proportion that a manual worker earning the average income pays in taxes, both direct and indirect, is higher now than it was then."

There is another article in *The Guardian* today which also questions the Government's credibility. It talks about the Government's campaign about the Opposition's so-called £35 billion spending plans. It says:

"the campaign was slightly dented by remarks last night by Brendan Bruce, former Conservative communication director, who said: 'No-one sensible in the Tory Party actually believes the Labour Party will put up public spending by £37 billion.'"

The Conservatives are criticised by their own. The Government know that what they are saying is false.

The Chancellor suggested that the Labour party would raise the basic rate of income tax to 35 per cent., but that was dismissed as absurd by Andrew Dilnot, the director of the Institute of Fiscal Studies. That suggestion shows, yet again, nothing but scaremongering by the Conservatives to undermine the Labour party.

Mr. Favell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McAvoy: I have only 10 minutes, so I must press on.

We will support a manufacturing investment initiative and a package to help small businesses and we will provide a boost for housing. Getting house building going again would provide the kick-start which has been mentioned by Conservative Members. We would support a programme for skills, work for the unemployed and to get the railways moving.

The recession is continuing. It is making life miserable for millions of our people and is severely challenging the country's economic prospects. The recession shows few signs of lifting, but the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do nothing except make bogus attacks on Labour party policy. What are they doing about the country?

The forecasts in the autumn statement are another part of the charade. The gloss of extra spending presented in the autumn statement is simply money to make up for the costs of the recession. Labour's policies to revive the economy are clear and will work. It is time to sweep aside the Government who believe that economic policy consists of doing nothing but trying to talk up recovery.

8.1 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) made a wonderful contribution to the debate, as he always does. Like my hon. Friend, I listened to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) with some amusement as he threw punches at my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and called upon him to stimulate industrial activity, to deal with the problems of the housing market and to reduce insolvencies and bankruptcies. He knew all the time that he would be unable to take the action necessary to deal with all those problems—reduce interest rates. The right hon. and learned Gentleman could not reduce interest rates because, like his party, he worships at the feet of the European sacred cow—the exchange rate mechanism. He knows that if he were to take office as Chancellor, he would not abandon the exchange rate mechanism because it is the first stage in the three-stage plan to take us to a single currency. He is committed to it. Anybody who votes for the Labour party thinking that it will reduce interest rates and deal with all the problems will soon be disillusioned.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is, alas, within the straitjacket of the exchange rate mechanism. I think that he has done remarkably well since becoming Chancellor. Given the confines within which he has operated, he has behaved in a masterly fashion. He has reduced interest rates by 4·5 per cent.—although I believe that the first 1 per cent. reduction occurred when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was Chancellor. The way in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor marshalled his troops, including my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, when the Germans increased their interest rates so that we did not have to follow them was extraordinary. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West that there is no way in which the Labour party could have reduced interest rates by 4·5 per cent. within the exchange rate mechanism or have defended our interest rate when the Germans increased theirs.

Having said that, in the words of the song, the time has come to review the situation. We must look again at the exchange rate mechanism. It is only 14 months since we joined the ERM and it is no secret that I would not have joined because I see it as a political move to take us towards a single currency and because it is the first stage of the three-stage Delors plan to take us ultimately to a European state. Even from an economic point of view——

Mr. Salmond: To my recollection, this is the fourth or fifth speech against the ERM from Conservative Members. Can the hon. Gentleman estimate for the benefit of the House how many of his colleagues share his view that withdrawal from the ERM should be an immediate priority for the Government?

Mr. Favell: I cannot possibly estimate how many there are, but there are probably almost as many on the Conservative Benches as on the Opposition Benches. Alas, the Opposition are so thirsty for office that no speaker dares mention the subject.

Like my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton, South-West and for Stafford (Mr. Cash), I think that the time has come to review the situation because of the water that has passed under the bridge since we joined the ERM. We joined the exchange rate mechanism before German reunification took place. The Germans have taken on 16 million people who were formerly in East Germany. That state was bankrupt, out-of-date and thoroughly socialist. They have exchanged one eastern mark for one deutschmark and they now have a monumental public sector deficit. As a result,

unexpectedly, they had to put up their interest rates. We have been unable to reduce our interest rates because we are locked in to them.

We read in the newspapers today that the German state is threatened with inflation and with strikes from the steel workers, bank clerks and car workers. Our economy depends on the way the German economy performs. It is far better to put our trust in my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor and my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary than leaving it to the German Bundesbank in which even the chairman, Karl Otto Pöhl, has lost confidence.

Since joining the ERM we have entered the most serious recession since the war. We have had growing unemployment, bankruptcies and mortgage repossessions. Those problems may not have been caused directly by joining the ERM, but it means that we are unable to deal with them. It is a total and unnecessary abdication of power and the decision to join was taken without the consent of the voters. I doubt whether it will even be an issue at the next general election—I am glad to see that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is nodding. If the Opposition take office, they will have done so without telling the people that they, too, will be unable to deal with the recession or with the things about which the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East was complaining.

Some say that the ERM has been essential in the battle against inflation. Was it? In the early 1980s we inherited an inflation rate which reached 27 per cent. at its height in May 1980. In three years it came down to 3·7 per cent. and that was without the benefit of the exchange rate mechanism. Oddly enough, during the same period, the rate against the deutschmark varied by less than 5 per cent. and between October 1979 and October 1983 our rate against the deutschmark went up. Yet we were not in the exchange rate mechanism.

I firmly believe that the time has come to reconsider our decision. As many of us thought when we joined, the ERM has not proved to be in the interests of the British people. By remaining in the mechanism, we shall take a gigantic gamble with British industry, the property market and jobs. Recently, the Bundesbank said that it will act in the interests of the German domestic economy, and it has done so. It believed that it was in the interests of the German domestic economy to increase interest rates shortly before Christmas. That is exactly what we should be doing. Hon. Members should be controlling the British economy in the interests of the British people, and we should take ourselves out of the ERM.

8.10 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Like the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell), I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen), not so much because I agreed with it but because it provided an antidote to the sterility of the economic exchanges of the past two weeks, which continued earlier this afternoon.

In some ways, it can reasonably be said that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West has dominated this economic debate. He asked the shadow Chancellor the question that has no answer: if the shadow Chancellor and the Labour party are committed to the same monetary policy as the Government—defending the position of sterling within the exchange rate mechanism—it can hardly be argued that interest rates would be different under Labour.

Interestingly, the Chancellor did not pursue the shadow Chancellor on that policy, no more than the shadow Chancellor seemed to want to pursue the Chancellor on the story in *The Guardian* today suggesting that the Government's aspirations and programme would cost about the same as the Labour party's—£35 billion. The reason why the shadow Chancellor and the Chancellor do not pursue each other on such points is clear: it is not in their interests to stress the similarity of the economic policies of Ministers and Labour Front-Bench spokesmen. It is far better to continue with the phoney war of exchanges that we have seen in the past two weeks. As the policy similarities increase, so the acrimony of the exchanges grows to attempt to find some semblance of a difference between two economic policies that are basically the same.

It is remarkable that the Government are attacking the Labour party for the over-ambition of its policy programme. To be committed to increasing pensions and child benefit and no other spending initiative can hardly be termed an over-extended programme. The weakness of Labour's policy programme is its lack of ambition. Its Achilles heel is its lack of firm commitments.

The Government should have a care about ascribing figures of £35 billion or £37 billion to any aspiration or policy objective of a party, because as in *The Guardian* story, exactly the same can be done to the Government. In addition, if one considers the detail of the Government's programme and assumes, as one reasonably can from statements that have been made, that a balanced budget is an objective of the policy, with the public sector borrowing requirement heading towards a £20 billion deficit next year, the same type of argument would have it that the Chancellor must be plotting to increase income tax by 10p in the pound in the Budget to square that circle and eliminate the PSBR deficit or perhaps even a larger increase in the percentage of VAT.

Similarly, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) said, if it is an objective—albeit a long-term one when circumstances allow—to reduce the direct rate of tax to 20p in the pound, it is reasonable for people to ask how it will be paid for within a Parliament. The Government and the Opposition should address the low standard of debate that, sadly, we have witnessed in the past fortnight.

I was disappointed that the chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee chose to attack the proposal to lift the ceiling on the national insurance contributions. As far as I know, that is the only tax proposal that the three Opposition parties in Scotland have in common. If one narrowly defines national insurance as an insurance scheme in itself, one can make an argument against it, but if one accepts, as most people surely do, that national insurance has become part of the income tax system, it is impossible to defend a position whereby people who earn more than £21,060 a year pay lower rates of marginal taxation than those who earn less. That is what would happen next year if nothing is done to correct that anomaly.

If Conservative Members are truly concerned about high marginal rates of taxation, they should consider not people earning more than £21,000 but those at the bottom of the earnings scale, who face by far the highest marginal

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rates of taxation. The Library made a quick calculation for me. I accept that it is a theoretical example, but none the less it shows that it is possible for someone who is on very modest earnings—through a combination of income tax, national insurance, family credit, rent rebates and poll tax rebate—to pay a marginal rate of tax on earnings of 96·04 per cent. Unless the proposal to lift the national insurance upper limit is carried, a family man on perhaps £7,000 a year will pay double the marginal rate of taxation of somebody earning more than £21,000 a year.

Half a dozen Conservative Members are present. I shall gladly give way if one of them can explain why a marginal rate of taxation of 49 per cent. for people earning more than £21,000 a year will have a disincentive effect, but apparently nothing is to be done about the marginal rate of taxation of 96 per cent. for those who earn about £7,000 a year. Is there any semblance of logic in that? Should it not be a priority to shift the burden of taxation from the lower paid to those on higher incomes?

I propose that the upper limit for national insurance be lifted and that the money be used to introduce perhaps a lower first rate of taxation, perhaps to raise tax allowances by 15 per cent., or to incorporate an allowance system into the national insurance system to try to attack the exceptionally high marginal rates of taxation for those on lower earnings. An Administration that had an ounce of compassion and economic rationale would be arguing for that policy.

The debate has done little to focus attention on the real constraints on the United Kingdom economy. I was a relatively young economist before I became an hon. Member, but even I remember the nostrum that the underlying weakness of the United Kingdom economy was that a balance of payments constraint emerged as soon as the economy moved towards recovery, and that recoveries would always be aborted by the balance of payments coming into play and acting as a constraint. According to the independent forecasts that are released by the Treasury, the balance of payments constraint on the current account is emerging before the economy has moved into recovery. The consensus of the forecasts of the organisations is that the current account deficit will increase from £6·6 billion this year to £8·6 billion next year. That is before any firm recovery in the United Kingdom economy.

The underlying weakness of the United Kingdom economy is becoming ever more evident. I think that the hon. Member for Stockport referred to the fact that no one had argued about some of the dangers of the ERM when we joined. I made a speech on 22 October 1990 in which I made some of the points that I am about to repeat. The rate at which we joined the ERM underscored some of the constraints on the United Kingdom economy and put it back into the fairly familiar position of trying to defend an exchange rate that is unsustainable.

In line with the United Kingdom's economic history, it is only a matter of time before someone writes a tract called "The Economic Consequences of Mr. Major". In *The Times* just before Christmas Anatole Kaletsky had a stab at what might be a precis for such a tract. He wrote that all players in the game of trying to find someone to blame for the problems in the United Kingdom's economy "are supposed to forget that John Major had anything to do with economic management in the past five years. They are not allowed to recall that Mr. Major was the Chancellor who panicked into raising interest rates to 15 per cent. in October 1989; or that it was Mr. Major who blundered into the ERM at the worst possible time with the wrong exchange rate. Above all, players must forget that Mr. Major was the man who, during his brief tenure as an ERM Chancellor, elevated the ERM into a sacrificial totem of a kind unknown in this country since the days of Stonehenge and John Barleycorn." That is an apt summary of the case that could be made against the present Prime Minister.

Mr. Favell: Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of our remaining in the exchange rate mechanism?

Mr. Salmond: I am coming to that. I was going to refer to the speech I made on 22 October 1990 which I am sure the hon. Gentleman remembers. I said that, although I was in favour of the ERM, there was a key difficulty for sterling's position in it. That difficulty can be described simply. The ERM has worked because it had a single dominant currency within its structure and the other currencies—they could be called subsidiary currencies—revolved around it as planets revolve around a star. The difficulty with sterling introduced into the exchange rate mechanism is a second centre of polarity because it is a major international tradeable currency. It is an investment currency with 90 per cent. of its value determined by capital flows as opposed to trade flows. Therefore, there are particular difficulties in trying to hold it within what was, in effect, a deutschmark block. In summary, I am in favour of the ERM but I have grave doubts about whether sterling is in the appropriate position, and I certainly have doubts about it being in at the level which there is now an attempt to defend.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-West asked about the economic impact of the parties' various policies. He rightly argued that if the Labour party was suggesting exactly the same policies as the Conservative party on the question of the ERM, the effect of the monetary policies of the two parties would be neutral. If we take the Labour party at its word and accept that its only definite spending commitments are to pensions and child benefit which will be financed within the tax system from the various tax increases outlined, Labour's fiscal position is also neutral. The tax increases will exactly match the planned expenditure increases. Therefore, the Labour party's fiscal and monetary position——

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton) *rose*——

Mr. Salmond: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) in a second. The Labour party's fiscal and monetary positions are neutral, so the economic effect of its fiscal and monetary policies will make little or no difference to the current recession. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is about to leave because I am coming to an interesting point.

The Labour amendment refers to measures which might help to stimulate the recovery but, as I understand it, none of them are spending commitments. The only spending commitments are to child benefit and to pensions. None of the measures for recovery are definite spending commitments.

Mrs. Beckett *rose*——

Mr. Salmond: I remember an interview that the hon. Lady gave on, I think, "On the Record" in which she made it absolutely clear that health spending was to be judged only as growth allowed in the economy and that there was

no distinct spending commitment. If that is the case for health spending which is currently of such supreme importance, surely it must also be the case for investment grants which are set out in the Labour party's amendment. The Labour party cannot have it both ways. If there are distinct spending commitments matched by taxation, there cannot be other spending commitments as detailed in the amendment.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting but entirely incorrect point. There are definite commitments in the anti-recessionary programme and they are covered by the taxation changes that we have announced. We have always made that clear. I am sorry if it is not clear to the hon. Gentleman—no doubt it is our fault or perhaps the facts were drowned in the barrage of noise from Conservative Members.

Mr. Salmond: I am glad to hear that, but perhaps we could have some quantification of the policies. Let us be clear that they are in addition to the spending commitments on pensions and child benefit which have been widely announced in the past few weeks as being the only key priorities of the Labour party.

Mrs. Beckett *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Salmond: I must tell the hon. Lady that the shadow Chancellor has tended to stress fiscal rectitude in the past few weeks and months. Indeed, it seems that he is attempting to outflank the present Chancellor on the right of the political spectrum.

Mrs. Beckett: I must once again correct the hon. Gentleman. He should pay more attention to the debate if he wants to use quotations. It is the Conservative party that pretends that we have referred only to pensions and child benefit. We have always made it clear that they were our initial, specific and costed commitments but for a considerable time—I think probably most of last year since the recession became evident—we have also advocated early moves on such issues as investment allowances and training. They were contained in our shadow Budget almost a year ago—they were identified and costed. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman did not know that, but it is not our fault.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Where is the cash coming from?

Mr. Salmond: That is exactly the point. It is sensible for the Labour party under current conditions to argue for an increase in the public sector borrowing requirement to pay for the additional fiscal measures.

I noticed that when the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) argued that expenditure during a recession could well be self-financing because of the stimulus that it gives the economy, he did not receive much support from Labour's Front Bench. The Labour Front Bench—albeit on a more modest scale—now seems to be arguing that its investment to take the country out of recession will be self-financing.

Mr. Mellor: I am sorry that I missed the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech and I shall not speak for long.

It is a funny old world. I have spent much of the past week—indeed, much of the past year—closeted in radio and television studios with the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). During that time she has said that it was a dreadful slur to suggest that the Labour party has anything other than the two commitments. Now, she is attacking the hon. Gentleman who dares to say that that is the case.

Mr. Salmond: I am coming to the point——

Mrs. Beckett *rose——*

Mr. Salmond: No, I shall not give way. I have been exceptionally generous to the hon. Lady, far more generous than the Labour Front Bench is to me when I try to intervene.

I have come to a conclusion about the two warring parties. It is excellent news if as a by-product of my speech the Labour party's fiscal policy has shifted to a more ambitious level. I think that the key weakness of its policy is that, without a substantial difference in either monetary or fiscal policies from those of the Government, nothing can be offered to shift the economy out of recession. I believe that such a substantial difference would be justified by the depth and level of the recessionary experience.

I wish to comment on Scotland's experience as it has undergone the recession in the past few years. It is generally agreed—especially by Conservative hon. Members who are anxious to blame the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) for all that has gone wrong—that the initial rationale behind a high interest rate policy was to cool down the overheated economy of the south-east of England which the right hon. Gentleman did so much to reinforce in the 1988 Budget. I have not heard anyone seriously argue that the Scottish economy was ever overheated.

In the early years of the penal interest rate policies, the wrong economic medicine was applied to Scotland. It is bad enough to suffer high interest rates if one suffers from the economic disease, but it adds insult to injury if one has to take the medicine without having had the disease in the first place. As I have gone on to argue, the high interest rate policy is now sustained by the requirement to defend the weak investment currency of sterling within the ERM.

We have substantial evidence that Scotland is not suffering from a balance of payments problem. There is no indication that a Scottish currency within the ERM would suffer from the same problems as sterling. On the contrary, a country such as Scotland, which exports more manufactured products per head than does Japan, would almost certainly have a comfortable balance of payments position.

From a Scottish perspective, this has been an unnecessary recession, provoked and sustained by policies totally inappropriate to Scottish economic conditions. Only when the constitutional framework has been fundamentally transformed can the Scottish economy be put back on the road to recovery and full employment.

8.30 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has done the House a great service with his speech, because he has thrown even more light than has already been thrown during the debate on the extraordinary confusion evident in the Labour party's spending and taxation plans.

Mrs. Beckett: This is becoming extremely boring. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was not here for

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the Budget debate last year, whether he does not listen or whether he is simply incompetent, but I have said over and over in the House what I have just said to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I have said it to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in the debates and exchanges to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman just referred. If his case is so strong, why does he need to misrepresent what others say?

Mr. Davies: I hear the hon. Lady's intervention with interest, and make a practical suggestion to her, which she may consider helpful. If she accepts my suggestion, it will greatly contribute to the clarity and integrity of political debate during the coming general election campaign. I have here a document that the hon. Lady knows very well —a document on Labour's public expenditure plans. She knows that those plans all add up to the famous figure of £37 billion. She should go through each individual item in the document, and say, "This is a genuine pledge, but that pledge is not genuine." If she does not like the figure of £37 billion, she should boil it down to the hard core of Labour's real spending plans—those that the party really intends to propose to the electorate. If the hon. Lady is willing even to make a start on that now, I shall, of course, give way to her again.

Mrs. Beckett: I shall make my speech later.

Mr. Davies: I look forward to the hon. Lady's speech, and I hope that she does as I suggested. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in an extremely good speech, repeatedly invited her and all her Front-Bench colleagues to do just that.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor described a number of the Labour party's spending proposals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I did not have the opportunity to listen to the earlier part of the debate, but as I understand it the debate is about the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Mr. Davies: As I have understood the debate so far, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been about public expenditure, including prospective public expenditure. Logically—I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will agree with me about this—the public expenditure that we shall face, if the terrible mishap of the Labour party's winning the election should arise, is very much a part of that subject. In that case, of course, for a large part—perhaps the greater part —of the coming financial year, the Chancellor's autumn statement will not govern the level of public expenditure; some other programme will govern it. We are attempting to find out what that other programme is. This is a matter of the keenest importance to every man and woman in the land.

Are the public expenditure plans in the Labour party's document to be believed? If not, what public expenditure plans is the Labour party offering the country? I warn the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs, Beckett) that a second question naturally and logically follows. When she has told us what her genuine public expenditure plans and pledges are—as opposed to the bogus ones that her colleagues have been putting about over the past months and years—a second question will arise, to which, equally, the electorate has a right to an answer. That question is: what proportion of those real additional incremental spending plans will be financed from taxation, and what proportion will represent incremental public borrowing? That is also a vital question, to which I shall look forward to receiving a concrete, specific, unambiguous answer in the hon. Lady's speech.

It is clear that the great result of the debate has been to put the focus clearly, effectively, and so far devastatingly, on the Labour party's expenditure plans. But I am sorry to say that not everything that might be said, and ought to be said, has been said on that subject, by any means.

I shall touch on three other aspects of those plans, which are crucial to the future of public spending in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will speak to the amendment to the motion. He has not done so so far.

Mr. Davies: The amendment on the Order Paper, Mr. Deputy Speaker, effectively offers the House, and therefore the country, a range of options for public expenditure policy over the coming year. If this is not an opportunity to debate the various possible scenarios for public spending over the next 12 months, I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will help me by giving me some advice about when the opportunity will arise for the House to discuss such a vital matter for everybody.

My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) has handed me a copy of the Opposition amendment, so I shall read part of it. The amendment

"condemns the failure of the Government to invest in the economic infrastructure and vital public services; and calls upon the Government to promote an investment-led recovery including financial incentives for investment in manufacturing, tax credits for the enhancement of technology, assistance for regional economic development and a major programme of education and training to tackle Britain's continuing skills crisis."

If that is not a range of public expenditure commitments, I do not know what it is. I hope that when I deal with those commitments you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will feel that I am acting within the rules of order.

So far, the Labour party's response to the autumn statement has been essentially a prospectus without a price —that is, a spivvy and rather worthless response.

As I said, I shall raise a number of pertinent questions that not only might be asked but need to be asked about that response.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I wonder whether for one moment the hon. Gentleman will deal with the words in the motion

"which have led to a substantial reduction in inflation and have laid the foundations for sustainable recovery".

Will he describe where those foundations are, and where are the signs of a recovery? I am a newcomer here, and I do not understand the rules of the House, but I thought that one of the elementary rules of debate was that one spoke to the motion tabled by one's right hon. Friends.

Mr. Davies: I am indeed speaking to the motion, but I shall now answer the hon. Gentleman's question about the foundations for recovery. The key foundation is the reduction of inflation. The hon. Gentleman will recall, as we all do, with no satisfaction, that this time last year inflation was about 10 per cent. The producer price index is now below 4 per cent. That is a remarkable turnround

by any historic standards in any country in the course of 12 months. If that is not the basis for renewed growth in the economy, I do not know what is.

Clarity would be added to our economic debates if Opposition Members made it clear that they do not suggest to the British public that if people were misguided enough to vote in a Labour Government there would never be a recession again—that the Labour party has it in its power to abolish the trade cycle and enter a qualitatively new phase of human economic history, in which there will no longer be a business cycle to contend with, and recessions will all be in the past. I am afraid that we shall always have the trade cycle and that there will always be recessions, whoever is in power. That is as certain as the weather. However, what matters is the response that one decides to make to such recessions.

It will not have escaped any hon. Member's attention that a number of Labour Members were rather concerned that I should not continue to add to their embarrassment and, no doubt, gloom by living up to my promise of making other pertinent points about Labour's economic policies which have been described this afternoon.

The first point has not been raised before, but it is extremely relevant. If Labour comes to power, it is committed to abolishing the capping of local authority expenditure. Unless that means that if local authorities spend more, a Labour Government would reduce central Government expenditure pound for pound to compensate, that one pledge effectively means that a future Labour Government would abdicate all control of local government expenditure. The whole country needs to take that on board. The hon. Member for Derby, South may give us tonight the only alternative to that prospect, which is that she commits a Labour Government, when they abolish the capping and control of local government expenditure, to reducing central Government expenditure pound for pound as local authorities increase their expenditure. Unless we have that pledge, the consequences and conclusions are unassailably and unambiguously clear.

My second point on Labour's attitude to increased spending is that Labour has failed to make clear, because Labour Members themselves are unclear about it, the extent to which when they increase public expenditure—whether it goes up to £37 billion or goes to a lower figure about which the hon. Member for Derby, South will tell us—that spending will buy increased value and services for the British public or for the sections of the British public who are intended to benefit. Or will that expenditure in fact be used simply to defray increased costs? If so, we shall simply end up spending more for the same. In that case, the public will be doubly defrauded because they will have paid the tax burden, the inflation burden or the burden on interest rates caused by higher public sector borrowing to pay for that increased expenditure, and the public will not get value as a result.

I give two concrete examples to the House. I heard only this morning from the most authoritative source possible in British Rail—I shall be no more specific than that—that the cost to British Rail alone of implementing the social chapter, which we know that Labour intends to implement, would be £500 million a year. The cost would be especially great for British Rail because railways have to operate at night and at weekends, so there is a lot of overtime. That is just one enterprise—in this case a nationalised enterprise—which would incur such costs.

We are told—I do not believe that the Labour party will be able to dispute this figure either—that the cost to the national health service of the minimum wage proposals, which Labour intends to introduce, would be about £500 million——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. All this is part of a far wider debate than a debate on the motion or on the amendments. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman will bring his remarks much closer to the subject of the debate.

Mr. Davies: I shall follow your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I just point out that the figures in the autumn statement will need to be revised to take account of the factors which I have mentioned if a Labour Government come to power, especially if they are in power for a significant part of the coming financial year? It is, therefore, necessary for the House and for the general public to be able to understand the full purport of the autumn statement so that they can take account of the amendments which would be required if the general election went the wrong way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend agree that everyone's private budget would have to be amended? Anyone who works over eight hours would have to start to pay national insurance contributions. At present, those earning under £52 a week do not have to pay. There will be enormous hardship for many part-time workers in the health service, for cleaners and for part-time postmen who will pay national insurance contributions which they have never had to pay before. Their employers will have to pay as well.

Mr. Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend and I most grateful for her intervention. I did not make those points myself because I am trying to focus on another aspect of the debate. My hon. Friend's point may be even more important and was extremely well made.

It is an illusion to suppose that the extra £35 billion or whatever would purchase additional services——

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it right that the hon. Gentleman should refer to Labour party policy when the subject of debate is the autumn statement, which is the direct responsibility of the Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I well understand the hon. Gentleman's point of view. I very much hope that the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) will now direct his remarks more closely to the matter before the House, as I have asked him to do on at least two occasions. Will he please do so or resume his seat?

Mr. Davies: I shall move on from the two earlier points to my third point. I think that you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that it goes to the heart of our public expenditure debate this afternoon. My third point is reflected in the words that I read earlier from the Labour amendment which we are discussing.

The Labour party has a remarkable tendency, which is frightening, to put objectives and targets in terms of inputs rather than of outputs. It focuses, bizarrely, on a certain sum which is often expressed as a certain proportion of gross national product or of gross domestic product which should be spent on something. Labour talks of spending 5·5 per cent. of GDP on education—a magic figure. It talks

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of spending 0·7 per cent. of GDP on overseas aid. It seems that one starts from a figure, which is taken out of the blue and which is always a nice round figure and presented as a proportion of GDP, which is a moving target, and then as a secondary and retrospective matter—if at all—one begins to explain why it is necessary to spend money in particular areas and in what specific areas the money will be spent.

I could understand an approach to the autumn statement which began by saying, "The following are our objectives in overseas aid. We need to provide for this in disaster relief. We need to get ourselves involved in these projects or to give this money to these agencies for this precise purpose. We are looking at the most efficient way in which to deliver these programmes and we have come down to the fact that the budget we shall need is x, y and z which add up to n." That would be the sensible and responsible way to conduct affairs and is the way that any institution in the hands of responsible and competent men and women would adopt. That description and those epithets clearly do not apply to Labour Front-Bench Members because they are presenting the very reverse of that approach as a substitute for financial management.

What is the policy? It is basically a policy of spend first and think later. One point about which I am confident is that one may occasionally be able to deceive portions of the British public on certain issues, but that one cannot sell the British public a policy based on that principle.

8.49 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): In a few weeks' time we shall be addressing the electorate. Therefore, I should like to say to the House what I propose to tell the electorate about the economic position and the relevance of the autumn statement. The truth, which no one has mentioned in the debate so far, is that there are grounds for believing that, far from our pulling out of the recession, Britain and the western world may be falling into a major slump comparable to that which occurred in the 1930s. That is a possibility which has not been touched on.

Of course, that itself could deepen the misery which is now occurring in the old Soviet Union, as, in panic, they try to copy the failed policies of the west. When I heard that the British Government were sending emergency aid to be auctioned in the Soviet Union, I thought that that must be the first time that an aid programme had been so arranged that only the rich could get hold of the aid, although it was said that the money raised would be spent on relief.

The crisis has caused enormous hardship to very large numbers of people. It is as much political as economic in its origins, and it requires a political response. I do not know how many homeless people, how many unemployed or how many people denied the services they need will have been much impressed by the statistics about what M0 had done in the third quarter compared to the first quarter of the last Labour Government. What impression will that have on the people that we, as Members of Parliament, know are suffering seriously?

What nobody ever says about interest rates is that, if a person is rich and lends money, high interest rates enrich him, but if he is poor and borrows money, high interest rates impoverish him. That aspect of interest rates has never been touched on.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I am not giving way, because I have only a few minutes, owing to a long speech having been made before mine.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose*——

Mr. Benn: I am not giving way to the hon. Lady in any circumstances.

There is no one left in the House who served here in the 1930s, yet we have to look back on that period in order to avoid the mistakes and learn the lessons. Not only was the suffering in Europe caused by the depression very serious, but it had serious political consequences as well. In Germany, unemployment rose from over 1 million in 1929 to 6 million in the two and a half years that followed. That brought Hitler to power.

In Britain, Oswald Mosley was quick to point out in the *Fascist Quarterly*:

"It is particularly interesting to note that that Fascist success in Italy and Germany followed upon capitalist trade depression."

If we are considering the possibility—we cannot put it higher than that—that the recession may be on its way down, and not on its way up, different policies will be necessary.

In America, Roosevelt, a progressive President, introduced the new deal. In Britain, we had some leaders who advocated different policies. I cite one because he came from the Conservative party—Harold Macmillan, then the Member of Parliament for Stockton on Tees. In his book "The Middle Way" in 1938, he said:

"We have lived so long at the mercy of uncontrolled economic forces that we have become sceptical regarding any plan for human emancipation. Such a rational and deliberate re-organization of our economic life would enable us, out of the increased wealth production, to establish an irreducible minimum standard which might progressively be raised to one of comfort and security."

In 1945, when we won the election—I participated in it as a young RAF pilot on leave—we published a manifesto commenting upon the hard-faced men who had controlled the economy between the wars. Mr. Attlee's manifesto said:

"They controlled the banks, the mines, the big industries, largely the press, and the cinema.

They controlled the means by which the people got their living.

They controlled the ways by which most people learned about the world outside.

This happened in all the big industrialized countries.

Great economic blizzards swept the world in those years.

The great inter-war slumps were not acts of God or of blind forces.

They were the sure and certain results of the concentration of too much power in the hands of too few men."

That was the policy which carried us to power. Indeed, I was elected to the Parliament over which Mr. Attlee still presided as Prime Minister.

It was not just the left of the Labour party which took that view. In the debate on the first motion of censure which Winston Churchill moved against the Government on 5 December 1945, a young Member, Hugh Gaitskell, referring to his colleagues on the Labour Benches, said:

"We have a philosophy of our own which binds us together . . . We believe, for example, that the present capitalist system

is inefficient, that it produces insecurity and that it is unjust. Can anyone deny those things?"—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1945; Vol. 416, c. 2364.]

It is worth looking back at that ideological conglomeration of opinions of Macmillan, Mosley, Roosevelt, Attlee and Gaitskell if we are to avoid what is already happening in France—a major growth of the National Front under Le Pen. That is a product of unemployment. In Germany, fascism is growing again. In Britain, the British National party is growing again. Perhaps in Britain the fascists were held back because they had for a period a Prime Minister who was doing their work for them; but they are reappearing.

I say to the House, as I shall say to my constituents when the election comes, that the problems we face have been caused largely by the uncontrolled international operation of market forces which place profit before people and widen the gap between the rich and the poor, here and worldwide. Every time a factory lays off people, they cannot buy the products of another factory, so another group of workers is laid off. That is the consequence of the system. Meanwhile, people who need homes and services cannot afford to purchase them, and they cannot get them provided through public expenditure.

What I put in the amendment which I tabled with 25 of my colleagues—quite a substantial body of opinion in the party—is that we need a national recovery plan which will restore full employment by stimulating industry, renewing the infrastructure, improving the environment, and expanding all essential services through a planned increase in public expenditure which alone can act as the engine of economic development here and worldwide.

Before the war, it was rearmament which brought us back to full employment. Everyone knows that. There were 3 million unemployed. They were hired and put into factories. Instead of being on the dole, they got a wage and paid their taxes, and the war was financed. All rearmament was public expenditure. My granny never bought a sten gun; my dad never had a Spitfire in the garage. Those were paid for by public expenditure. Now there must be public expenditure to reconstruct our industry. Of course it would have to be financed by cuts in the arms budget, by harnessing the nation's savings, by fair and progressive taxation, and by borrowing.

If that is to work, it must involve the nation as a whole. We cannot plan it just at the top. Neither the Bank of England nor the Bundesbank nor the Cabinet can do it. That must mean a restoration of democracy in local government. When a local authority is elected, if it says that it will do something, it must be free to do it. Why was the GLC abolished? It was because the Government were not prepared to accept decentralised power, full trade union rights and other civil liberties.

It amuses me to see Tory party statements and horror stories about Labour and the trade unions. Conservative Members always boast about fewer days being lost and about there being fewer industrial disputes under this Government. Let us consider days off—we must not just consider industrial disputes—and unemployment. As I put to the Chancellor in an intervention, 3 million working days are lost every day because of unemployment, which is the direct product of the Government's policy. Conservative Members never mention that. The cost of that is £50 billion a year, bearing in mind the dole, benefits such as housing benefit and the loss of production. When they frighten us with the £37 billion, or whatever they cook up at Tory central office, they omit to mention the £50 billion that they themselves consciously waste.

What is the point of attacking those who think that we do not need Trident when Cabinet has agreed to unilateral economic disarmament by handing over the key powers over our own economy to those who are responsible for the ERM and EMU and, ultimately , the single currency and the Bundesbank? People are slowly coming to realise that that is the way ahead.

When the whistle blows and Parliament is dissolved, I shall fight my 16th election as a candidate. I detect already a substantial body of opinion that shares the views that I have tried briefly to summarise. These views may threaten the power and the privileges of the bankers and the multinationals. They may offend the sensibilities of the clever economists and smug media commentators who presume to tell us what we can and cannot do. However, unless we take action, we could slip into a slump, the political and economic consequences of which could cost this country very dear indeed, as happened from 1939 to 1945.

I shall say all that in Chesterfield when the election comes. If the policies that I have mentioned, which are socialist policies, were to be carefully prepared and advocated with conviction and introduced by consent through the democratic process, they would win the active support of the majority of people in Britain. That is plain common sense, but, more than that, it offers hope to people who are now in despair. No country can solve its economic problems if the people can see no light at the end of the tunnel. After 13 years of this Government, that is the reality for many who thought that it would be good but who now find that they are scraping along at the bottom.

9 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): All over this country, people look around them at the schools, the hospitals, the roads and the railways. They worry about their jobs, their mortgages and their poll tax, and they say to themselves, "Surely there must be a better way. Isn't there a better way than this?"

The answer is a resounding yes. There are alternative policies and different choices, and it is not only the Labour party who says so. There are better ways of identifying those choices, and it is not only the Labour party who says so. The fact that there are alternatives is the fact that the Government are most desperate to conceal—so desperate that they do not seem to care what they say. No one is saying that our problems can easily or speedily be resolved; they are too deep for that. However, the fact that we cannot do everything at once does not mean that there is nothing at all that we can do.

We are debating—or some of us are—the Government's autumn statement. Its weaknesses have already been identified. Those weaknesses are most obvious where the statement talks of the condition of the economy. But when the assessment of the condition of the economy is deeply flawed, so too must be the assessment, the shape and the scale of the public spending programme. Even before the recent Government admissions of continuing economic weakness—admissions which undermined the whole picture in the autumn statement—its flaws were evident. The unemployment assumption, which is used as the basis for the autumn statement figures on

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forecast spending, was already out of date when the forecast was published. It does not say so in the published document; the admission was dragged out of the Chancellor on the Floor of the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice).

There were early questions about the scale of privatisation receipts and the anxieties raised—first, about how sound the figures are, and, secondly and much more seriously, about how sound is the public expenditure planning process which depends so heavily upon such rather dubious assumptions—questions again raised by the Select Committee and, I suspect, not answered altogether to its satisfaction. Always, because of what the Prime Minister calls the primary objective of the Government, there is the underlying query about whether, hidden in the opacity of the autumn statement, there is enough room for manoeuvre to allow for further cuts in income tax instead of further public investment.

This year, it appeared that the answer was no; then, lo and behold, just before Christmas, desperate to say something about the problems of house repossessions—problems that they dismissed as insignificant throughout 1989, 1990 and 1991, while thousands of families lost their homes—the Government found £1 billion that they did not yet need to spend on stamp duty relief.

It suggests an interestingly cavalier attitude to the public purse—£1 billion overlooked, judging from the Chancellor's tone when he announced it. But then, perhaps more worryingly, the Chief Secretary also thinks that £1 billion or £2 billion is neither here nor there, to judge from the way, on "Newsnight" last night, he dismissed the revelation of the Conservative party's party political broadcast alleging a Labour programme of £35 billion, when he had announced on the same day that it cost £37 billion, as a mere bagatelle. We do not regard £2 billion as a bagatelle, but it is yet further evidence of the incompetence of the Conservative party.

It is the combination of incompetence, of errors and of obscurity in the autumn statement that make it so dangerous to place any real reliance on it as a guide to the Government's public spending plans.

The Government's record also calls the autumn statement into question. In the run-up to the 1983 election, they had inflation at less than 4 per cent. and interest rates at less than 10 per cent., and they promised funding for improved public services and an income tax cut. A month after the election, they cut public spending because of "unforeseen factors" and, incidentally, within two years inflation had doubled and interest rates had reached 14 per cent.

In the run-up to the 1987 election, they had inflation at just above 4 per cent. and interest rates at 9 per cent., and they promised funding for improved public services. With the election safely over, funding for public services stood still and billions of pounds were lavished on the income tax cuts of 1988. Incidentally, within two years of that election, inflation had doubled on its way to 10·6 per cent., interest rates were heading for the 15 per cent. at which they stuck for long enough to make this, as was said recently, the worst recession of modern times, and the same scenario was repeated.

Today, in the run-up to the 1992 election, the Chancellor of the Exchequer offers us inflation at just above 4 per cent. and interest rates at 10·5 per cent., and he promises increased funding for the public services and further income tax cuts. Even if the figures in this autumn statement stood up—and they do not—the Government's record demonstrates that they cannot be trusted as guardians of the public service.

Whatever revenues are earned, there is a clear choice between their use for public investment and services and for tax cuts, as the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have emphasised again and again. The autumn statement reiterates that the Government will continue to reduce the share of the nation's wealth that goes into public spending. The Prime Minister recently emphasised the case for continuing tax cuts by saying that it was their primary objective to reduce taxation at the lower end, the objective of moving to a 20p level of taxation, because it was right that people should own more of their income to spend in their own interests and in the interests of their family.

Let us examine the nature of that choice and of that freedom. If leaks of recent days are to be believed, implicit, although not evident, in the autumn statement are further income tax cuts of perhaps 1p in the pound. What is that choice worth? Half of all men in work earn at or below £14,430 a year, median earnings. From a 1p cut in income tax at the standard rate, a single man with no mortgage would gain £2·14 a week; with a mortgage, it would be less than £1·50—better than a kick in the teeth, although not enough, under this Government, for a prescription. Private health insurance would cost that individual more than twice as much.

From a 1p income tax cut, a man on average earnings of over £16,600 with no mortgage would gain just over £2·50 a week, less if he had a mortgage, and still half of what private health insurance would cost.

Let us take a family with its varying needs. A one-earner, two-child family on the median wage of around £14,000, with an average mortgage of £37,000, would gain from a 1p cut in income tax £59·65 a year—£1·15 a week.

Health insurance with reasonable cover for that family would be more than £800, or more than £15 a week, which is—

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. John Maples): So what?

Mrs. Beckett: The Economic Secretary to the Treasury asks, so what? I am describing the false nature of the choice that the Prime Minister claims to postulate to the British electorate. He says that he will give the electorate the freedom to have an extra £1 or perhaps £1·50 a week, when the services that are being undermined by the billions of pounds forgone will cost an elector tens or hundreds of pounds.

Middle-range private school fees, as our state-funded system is undermined, are £1,500 a year, or almost £29 a week. That is 25 times as much as such a family would gain from a 1p cut in income tax. Middle-range private secondary school fees are £3,500 a year, or £67 a week. That is 58 times as much as such a family would gain from a 1p cut in income tax.

I do not want to be too unkind to the Government. Let us consider a two-earner family for whom the second income of more than £7,600 represents the earnings of half of all women in manual work. In addition to what the man might gain from his tax cut, that family would gain an

extra 84p a week. The figures are of the same order for those on average earnings of more than £16,000. It is a matter of extra pence or perhaps £1 a week.

Let us consider a married couple whose circumstances are more familiar to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury—who is, if I recall rightly, a member of Lloyds and probably does not mix in these circles—both earning at the top of the income scale where they are still only paying the standard rate of tax. This is a much more difficult couple about whom the Government are concerned, and this is the best case for the Government, as we are considering the top 94 per cent. of taxpayers.

Taking account of all the potential allowances, if the man has a gross income of £32,000 and maximum mortgage interest relief, and she earns £26,800—this may come as a shock to Conservative Members, but that is not a totally typical couple although it is the best case that we can make—1p off their tax is worth £235·20 each. That is a grand total of £470·40 a year. That is still nowhere near the cost of private health insurance or school fees.

What would happen if any of those families had elderly relatives on their way to private nursing homes? The standard cost for residential care is £9,000 a year, or £180 a week. If the care is indeed care in a nursing home, the standard cost is closer to £255 or £275 a week, or £14,300 a year. That is the real nature of the costs to individuals on those earnings and on the services that no doubt the Government hope they will believe they can replace as the state services are undermined by the Government's determination to forgo revenue for income tax cuts. As their determination to cut public spending to allow income tax cuts undermines state provision, more and more families with no choice must use those facilities, because nothing else is on offer.

When the Government claim that they are offering people better choice by prioritising income tax cuts over public investment, that is not a choice for most families —it is sheer insanity.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): It seems that the hon. Lady is basing her entire argument on the fact that she would require the whole nation to take out private health insurance. Her concern about expenditure on the national health service should take account of the fact that, while the present Government have reduced income tax, they have also created an economy in which expenditure on the national health service has been increased in real terms by 50 per cent. The Labour party, when it was in power, was the best recruiting sergeant for private health insurance in this country.

Mrs. Beckett: If that is true, why did the Government bother to provide tax relief to encourage people to take out private health insurance? *[Interruption.]* If he had been here he might have followed it.

The Government continually use a phoney analogy. They think that by cutting income tax they are in some way offering people greater freedom and that it does not matter if public services are undermined, as there is an option, a choice, a substitute. That is total nonsense.

Labour gives priority to public investment, and we are proud of it. Pensioners should be the first priority. Younger pensioners may have good extra occupational or state pensions. If so, good luck to them. At least 1 million pensioners—some of them the oldest and most frail—who never earned enough to save and never even had a chance to belong to good occupational schemes, are living at less than income support level. They are the generation who regard income support as charity. They will not claim it, and they are not going to change now. The only way to help these people is Labour's way—by increasing the basic state pension for all.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The hon. Lady is making a very clear and very logical statement, but is not the logic of her position that she ought to want to increase the basic rate of tax?

Mrs. Beckett: We do not believe that most ordinary families in this country could afford to pay any more tax. They have been hit by the present Government, under whom the tax burden has increased. Taxes are higher than they have ever been in this country's history, and the burden falls disproportionately heavily on lower-income families. That was so even before the introduction of poll tax. Everyone has had to pay VAT increases and increased national insurance contributions. People cannot afford to bear a heavier burden, and we shall not put a heavier burden on them. As I have said, the only way to help pensioners is Labour's way—by giving them an increase in the state pension.

Millions of children belong to families whose income is at or below income support level. Half of these children belong to the families of the unemployed, and many belong to families who have work but at a desperately low rate of pay. The best way to help them all is Labour's way —by increasing child benefit to £9·95 for every child, to reflect 1987 value. We shall fulfil the pledge given by the Prime Minister in 1987 and abrogated every year since then. Under Labour, child benefit will be paid "as now".

The package of tax and national insurance changes that we actually propose will include lifting the ceiling on national insurance contributions, which will affect only those on individual earnings of £405 a week, or £21,000 a year, from April; introducing a new top rate tax of 50p in the pound, which will affect only those on individual earnings well above £30,000 a year. This package, set against our pension and child benefit changes, will leave 96 per cent. of families better off. That figure was produced by the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies.

From our package, we could readily cover not only the proposals I have just described but also our anti-recession measures to kick-start the recovery. It is a package with measures to promote investment and provide capital allowances similar to those that industry and commerce are begging for—pleas that are falling on the deaf ears of the Chancellor. We would also introduce measures to support training, provision for which is still being cut, as both the autumn statement and the Chief Secretary's evidence to the Select Committee have revealed, while unemployment soars.

We shall begin to release some of the money that local authorities already have to stimulate construction and help the homeless. There will be a pilot scheme, in partnership with the private sector, to put new rolling stock on Network SouthEast—rather more useful than name badges for the guards. We know we can fund all that, because we know that we can raise the additional revenues we need, and we have told the British people where they will come from.

That package is what the Chief Secretary the other day called "socialist spite", a typically graceful phrase from the

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right hon. and learned Gentleman. In April 1988, in this Parliament, the Government implemented the changes pushed through when the Prime Minister was a Minister at the Department of Social Security. They cut benefits to pensioners, the severely disabled, widows, the unemployed, those with industrial injuries and families with children, in or out of work. There are still a few thousand of the biggest losers who have not had a single penny increase in income from that day to this. What sort of spite was that—or was it just Conservative callousness?

Mr. Quentin Davies *rose*——

Mrs. Beckett: I am confident that these issues are something about which the hon. Gentleman knows absolutely nothing.

What we have promised in our "most urgent" package we know we can deliver. We are constantly asked by Conservative Members to state our highest priorities. We have. We are constantly asked to say how we will pay for them. We have. We can identify areas of spending where different choices and priorities can be exercised—for example, using city technology colleges funding to provide nursery places. We can identify areas where money is wasted, such as the poll tax.

Any attempt to draw up a wider programme would have to rely overwhelmingly on the only information available to the Opposition—the autumn statement in its present form. As the Select Committee pointed out, last year's autumn statement was out of date by March. This autumn statement was in doubt when it was published. We can rely neither on what it says about the state of the economy nor on the little that it reveals about the state of the public finances.

The Chief Secretary said yesterday that he wanted a serious debate about the economy, yet the ridiculous, but no doubt expensive, campaign that the Government are running is designed to do the very opposite. The Government wish to discuss neither where we are on the economy nor what we can do about it. All the sound and fury of the past few days has been a desperate diversion designed first to draw attention away from the unemployment figures, the inflation figures, and the figures for businesses closed and homes repossessed; and, secondly, to draw attention away from what the Labour party is actually saying, and for the simplest of all reasons —they know it makes sense.

Let us indeed debate the choices before the country; this is the forum for that. However, let us not pretend that there cannot be a choice. The form of the autumn statement makes that debate more difficult, and in 13 years the Government have done little or nothing to improve it. It must be redesigned so that it illuminates the choices facing the country—not, as now, obscures them.

We believe that the final public spending decisions and the Budget should be brought together, so that people can see clearly where the money that is raised will actually be spent. We want the capital and revenue spending of Government more clearly identified, so that we can judge the balance of investment for the future and what we spend today. We want far greater clarity in what we get for our money, measuring output and value for money, not just input.

Most essential of all for the future assessment of public finance, we must establish a truly independent source of economic statistics to ensure that judgments are not distorted—as they have been under this Government, by political interference in their collection or presentation.

Although information can do much to foster debate, it cannot replace judgment. Perhaps the most extraordinary of all the peculiar things that the Chancellor has said during his period in office was his comment on, I believe, 8 January:

"the policy would not have been different had we known the outcome".

The right hon. Gentleman and all his colleagues have constantly reiterated the view that there is no need for a change of policy, that there is no alternative to present policies and that, if re-elected, the Government would pursue the same course. Now we have their final assurance that things

"would not have been different had we known the outcome."

I wonder what the thousands of people who have lost their jobs, homes, businesses or all three thought when they read that.

I believe the Chancellor when he says that, and that is why the Government have to go. A fourth Tory term would mean a fourth Tory recession as surely as night follows day. It is not true that there are no alternatives to their policies. It is not true that there are no choices to be exercised differently; and because there are choices, there is hope. It will not be easy to turn this country's economy round, but it can be done.

The Conservative party ignores the economic policies that we propose, although many independent commentators identify that they would be not only successful, but more successful than the Government policies—

Mr. Greg Knight (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Name one.

Mrs. Beckett: I can, indeed, name one as it happens —*[Interruption.]* Oxford Economic Forecasting refers to

"The . . . better long-run growth picture in the Labour case . . . arises from better productivity gains".

In other words, there would be better growth under Labour.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research has stated that, in the longer term— *[Interruption.]* I am giving the hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) his answer. He and his hon. Friends should listen. The national institute stated that our policies

"could raise the sustainable level of output in the United Kingdom and might also bring about a lasting reduction in unemployment".

Goldman Sachs has referred to our "extra training provisions" while James Capel has stated that there can be little doubt that our

"supply-side measures . . . would improve the United Kingdom's long-term sustainable growth rate and expand the supply-side of the economy".

[HON. MEMBERS: "More, more."] I am so glad that the hon. Member for Derby, North asked me that question——

Mr. John Townend: Ask her another one—ask about policy.

Mrs. Beckett: Now to our policies for benefits and taxation. I have referred to our policies on the economy and to many independent views of them. We often hear one phrase in particular from Conservative Members about our policies on benefits and taxation. They talk

about the "politics of envy"—a revealingly ugly, negative phrase that sets one person against another. We have described the policies that we advocate as the "ethics of community"—as something that calls on what is best and most generous in the human spirit. That is the essence of the choice that the people will face in the election. It will be a choice between the politics of envy, as advocated so often by the Conservative party, and the ethics of community. When the Prime Minister has the guts to call the election, we shall be ready.

9.28 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): This has been a debate about two documents, only one of which has been tabled. I refer to our document, the "Autumn Statement", which sets out clearly the Government's spending priorities for the next three years. To pick up the point that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) made at the end of her speech, that document makes substantial additional provision for a range of public services, such as the national health service, social security and pensions.

This is an autumn statement of which my right hon. and hon. Friends and I are proud. It is the autumn statement of a Government who have been able to increase public expenditure, in a well-targeted and specific way, by 20 per cent. in real terms during their lifetime; under Labour, it fell by 2½ per cent. in real terms. However much Labour may talk about public expenditure, it normally makes such a mess of the economy that there is little benefit to be found in the longer run.

The House ought to be given the opportunity to see another document: the document that sets out Labour's programme, and presents the alternative that Labour Members are well able to encapsulate in amendments to motions but always fight shy of actually producing. That document will tell us Labour's spending priorities, and how it will balance those priorities. Up and down the country, Opposition Front-Benchers have come out with protestations about what they will give this, that and the other interest group; the document will make clear the order of priorities, and will begin to explain how the expenditure will be paid for.

It is not only the Conservative party that has asked for such an explanation; Labour supporters and sympathisers have done so as well. What about Mr. Hugo Young, who wrote in *The Guardian* yesterday? *[Interruption.]* Ah, Mr. Young has been disavowed, has he? Whenever we quote anyone, Labour Members seem anxious to become an even smaller group: they want to disavow even those who write for *The Guardian*, if what they say does not suit Labour. Mr. Young wrote:

> "But we need to know more about priorities. An outline Labour public spending white paper would not be impossible to produce. Is it schools before hospitals, or houses before anything, after pensions and child benefit?"

We have heard two extensive speeches from the Opposition Front Bench, but they did not devote a single minute to answering that basic, common-sense question.

Because nature abhors a vacuum, we have had to produce the second document for today's debate—"Labour's Public Expenditure Plans". That document sets out Labour's views. It reveals all that has been said in the many policy launches and the speeches that have been made all over the country. Let me say this to Labour Members: if for one moment they feel uneasy about the document, let us have the alternative that they have tabled; let us know where we stand.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Awful!

Mr. Mellor: What is the matter with the hon. Gentleman? He has not been seen in the Chamber throughout the debate, and now he comes in shouting "Awful!" It would be encouraging to believe that he was capable of listening as well as jeering. Perhaps if he listened for a bit and then jeered, he would at least be able to jeer from a better-informed position.

We have not just heard what the official Opposition have to say, or what the Government have said in the autumn statement; we have heard what the Opposition's opposition suggest, in the form of the amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). I did not agree one bit with his speech, but I will say this for him: at least he has political integrity. At least he states his beliefs as they really are, and does not mould them to electoral advantage. The right hon. Gentleman pointed out exactly what has happened: a substantial body of opinion in the Labour party supports his amendment. Twenty-five Members—more than 10 per cent. of the parliamentary Labour party—support the amendment. I wonder how many others would have liked to sign it but did not feel that they should.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is one of those who would have liked to sign the amendment. I give way to him so that he can enlighten us.

Mr. Snape: Does the Chief Secretary remember the October 1974 general election when he was my opponent in West Bromwich and then described me as a militant? Is he sure, all these years later, when he makes remarks about my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) that he could recognise one now?

Mr. Mellor: I am not sure that militant was a word in common parlance at that time. I think that I accused the hon. Gentleman of being a member of the Tribune group, which was then a significant force in the Labour party. Then it moved a great deal leftwards and left the hon. Gentleman looking quite bourgeois compared with some of the later entrants to the Labour party. I do not begrudge the hon. Gentleman his moment of happy, nostalgic reflection. As he knows, he got the biggest majority he has ever had in his constituency against me. Things have become much more difficult since then.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that there should now be a little less militancy. Come on, please.

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. Member for Chesterfield and 24 other Members of Parliament have put their names to a return to the alternative economic strategy—a return, once again, to the longest suicide note in history. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] It is all very well for Opposition Members to say "Oh!" but all of them were happy to fight the 1983 election on exactly that manifesto. Those who think that the Labour party has become a safe party—a party that it would be safe to elect because it has learnt all its lessons—should not forget that it is a pretty wild dream to imagine that the Labour party would get a majority in the House. It is an even wilder dream to imagine that it

[Mr. Mellor]

would get such a majority that it could escape from being held to ransom by the 25 Members who signed the amendment. That is another blow to the credibility of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen who speak on Treasury matters. Why otherwise would the right hon. Member for Chesterfield feel the need to table such a motion and why would 24 other Members sign it, if they had real confidence in what they were being told by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen and agreed with them?

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: I do not seem to be able to make a speech without an intervention from the hon. Gentleman. Has he been taking lessons from the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) in arm movements, or perhaps he is auditioning for a part in "Thunderbirds"?

Mr. Radice: I was just wondering when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was going to tell the House how his Government intend to get out of the recession that they have created.

Mr. Mellor: As it happens, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor devoted most of his speech to doing precisely that, but I did not detect a great deal of interest on the Opposition Benches in what he had to say.

I am dealing with rather more interesting matters. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it clear where we stand and we now want to know where the Labour party stands. It is clear that, if the Labour party were elected, the position in which we find ourselves today would become dramatically worse. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) knows that, even if some Opposition Back Benchers do not. That is why the right hon. and learned Gentleman keeps quiet about interest rates. He no longer talks about 1 per cent. off. He knows that the organisations that the hon. Member for Derby, South said commend Labour party policy and many others are arguing amongst themselves about only one thing—how much the Labour party would have to put up interest rates in order to establish its credibility if it were elected.

What is the Opposition's alternative to the autumn statement? *[Interruption.]* Even if Opposition Members are not interested, plenty of people in the wider community are interested. About 60 per cent. of people in that wider community told a Harris poll that they believed that Labour would raise the basic rate of tax, 57 per cent. told a Gallup poll that they believed that they would pay more tax under a Labour Government and 59 per cent. told an NOP survey that they thought that their take-home pay would be hit. Even more interestingly—this may interest the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who has resumed shouting—a survey of Labour Members of Parliament done by Access Opinions Ltd.——

Mr. Sheerman: When?

Mr. Mellor: That is hardly relevant, but the survey took place last week. Access Opinions Ltd. asked a number of Labour Members for their views on taxation and what the Chancellor should do in the Budget. A total of 5 per cent. said that they would want the basic rate increased by more than 2p, 40 per cent. said that they would want it increased by 2p and 11 per cent. want it increased by 1p. That is Labour's hidden agenda.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): How many Labour Members were polled?

Mr. Mellor: Such questions should be directed to Access Opinions Ltd. *[Interruption.]* I dare say that if the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) wishes to challenge the integrity of Access Opinions Ltd. it would be delighted to consult its lawyers. I understand that it was a sample of 100 Members of Parliament.

Mrs. Beckett: Has anybody told the Chief Secretary that that survey also questioned Conservative Members and revealed that more than half of those surveyed did not think that there should be a cut in income tax in the Budget?

Mr. Mellor: What is the Labour party's view on that poll? Does the fact that half of the sample of Conservative Members said that there should be no change in income tax in this Budget invalidate a survey in which well over half the hon. Lady's colleagues who were consulted said that the basic rate of income tax should go up? It is not our credibility on tax matters that needs to be proved, but the Labour party's. The Labour party is not trusted on tax matters, and that is small wonder when its Members of Parliament say things like that.

Mr. Battle: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I want to push on. I wonder whether —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to calm down. We have only 15 minutes left.

Mr. Mellor: Commenting on Labour's public expenditure plans, *The Economist* said:

"It has tried to respond to its familiar dilemma—of wanting to be a high-spending party without being a high-taxing one—by splitting itself in two. Mr. Smith reassures the City and voters generally about his tax plans. But shadow spending ministers pander to health workers, teachers and the low-paid with a different tune. By harping on 'Tory underfunding', they deliberately create the impression that a Labour Government would spend far more. Yet unless taxes were raised substantially, it could not."

It is absolutely clear that many Labour Members want taxes to be raised but are not prepared to say so. They want taxes raised that have an impact on ordinary people.

Labour Members say that they want to have a debate, yet because they have been discomfited in other debates they have come in to the Chamber to start shouting and jeering. If they think that the public will be impressed by that, all well and good.

We listened to the hon. Member for Derby, South when she gave us the present status of Beckett's laws—a pledge to increase pensions and child benefit, to which the new manufacturing package has been added. In addition, there are all the other measures included in this document. Labour Members may jeer in a debate in the House, but do they believe that they will get through an election campaign with the inconsistencies that are revealed in this document?

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: No. I had enough of the hon. Gentleman when I increased my majority against him in the past two elections.

Let us see if Labour Members have an answer to one of these pledges. In 1990, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), who leads for Labour on overseas development, said:

"I want to see Britain reach the UN aid target of 0·7 per cent. of GDP as top priority."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] The support that that quotation received proves the point. The hon. Member for Derby, South appeared on "On The Record" on 19 May last year. She said:

"No, that is a goal and it's explicity set out as a goal. That's what we're aiming for. Nobody is absolutely able to put their hand on their heart and say we know we can get there."

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) told the Labour party conference——

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): Will the Chief Secretary give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I shall complete the point.

The right hon. Member for Gorton told the Labour party conference:

"Over our first Parliament we shall increase Britain's aid budget to the United Nations target of 0·7 per cent. of GNP."

Those words are significant, even to Labour Members who want to open their mouths and close their ears. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"That is a firm commitment, costed and clear that I pledge our Labour Government will carry out."

Mr. Sheldon *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall give way in a moment.

We have an atmosphere reeking of deceit—the unmistakable whiff of under-arm aspirations. When the hon. Member for Derby, South is pressed, she makes a clear statement that it is nothing but an aspiration. But no less weighty a person than the shadow Foreign Secretary gives the clear statement that it is

"a firm commitment, costed and clear".

If it is, the hon. Lady should tell us how Labour will pay for it.

Mr. Sheldon: I may have minority tastes, but I came here to find out what the right hon. and learned Gentleman would say about the autumn statement. I am interested in the method of recovery because we have the highest levels of unemployment, the highest real rates of interest and a deplorable balance of payments. When the recovery comes—I suppose that whatever Government are in power, even one as incompetent as this, some sort of recovery will come eventually—what will happen to the balance of payments? I want to hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman's answer.

Mr. Mellor: I am dealing with how we can save the country from the kind of economic muddle that existed when the right hon. Gentleman was a Treasury Minister. He was the Financial Secretary to the Treasury when Lord Barnett was Chief Secretary, and we know what he had to say. This will be a trip down memory lane for the right hon. Gentleman. Lord Barnett said:

"The 1974-79 Labour Government had a difficult economic and financial task rendered impossible by pledges foolishly made without any serious thought as to where the money would come from. You name it, we were pledged to increase it. The crucial lesson for all political parties must be that we cannot take growth for granted, and above all, we should not plan in advance how to spend it. Even if we manage growth of 1 or 2 per cent. a year it will largely be needed to meet demographic changes."

The Labour party's document makes it clear that Labour has forgotten every word, and that is why the country needs to be saved from a Labour Government.

Another reason why the country needs to be saved from a Labour Government is that it is bad enough to have the type of nonsense that went on in Luigi's restaurant happening when the Labour party is in opposition, but it would be especially ridiculous if it happened with the Labour party in government.

I want to ask the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East a thing or two. If a week is a long time in politics, two days were a long time in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's life last week. It all seemed so clear when he appeared on the Frost programme two days before the Leader of the Opposition's visit to Luigi's restaurant. The right hon. and learned Gentleman was asked extensively by Mr. Frost—I have the transcript here and it goes on a fair bit—about Labour's policy. He set out clearly——

Mr. Battle *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: I shall not give way. I am dealing with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. He told Mr. Frost about Beckett's law and Mr. Frost asked him several times whether the level of taxation that would then result——

Mr. Battle *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman is trying to disrupt my speech because he does not want to hear what the country wants to know. For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to give way to the hon. Gentleman and, if he persists in intervening, it is merely because the Labour party's grasp of democracy cannot survive a week such as the previous one. It does not want to know.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: Things are really bad when the buffoonish tendency has to come out.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is it?

Mr. Foulkes: The debate is entitled "Autumn Statement". The Chief Secretary has spoken for 22 minutes but has not mentioned the autumn statement. We have heard only advertisements for Luigi's restaurant.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Since I have been in the Chair, the Chief Secretary has been interrupted so often that there has not been much opportunity for him to do that.

Mr. Mellor: Has the hon. Gentleman, who reads with his lips so much that he could almost give lessons to the Leader of the Opposition, read the amendment which deals with precisely this issue? *[Interruption.]* It is pretty disgraceful if I cannot put to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East the points which have been the centre of debate in this country for the past 10 days, but I shall do so.

David Frost put it to the right hon. and learned Gentleman no less than three times that it would be an unfair burden on many people who are not rich if he were

[Mr. Mellor]

to carry out immediately his proposed taxation arrangements to pay for Beckett's law—the abolition of the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions and the 50 per cent. increase in the top rate of tax. He had endless opportunities. The transcript goes on for pages and pages, and not a single word was said about any of those increases being phased in. Indeed, finally, David Frost asked:

"I mean in the situation that if you find that those two moves, the tax at 50p and the National Insurance contribution raised £4·5 billion or £4·8 billion"—

which David Frost said was more than the right hon. and learned Gentleman needed—

"you wouldn't adjust what you're going to do, downwards?"

That gave the right hon. and learned Gentleman every opportunity to say that the increases would be phased, but what did he say? He said:

"I reserve my position on that because I have not only got to find money for the welfare changes. I want to see the National Health Service properly financed".

[Interruption.] This noise is worse than the Shed at Chelsea football club. Is this really what Parliament is all about? Is this what Parliament is coming to?

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: We can take it—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West) *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: And we can take all that, as well. We can certainly take this point: on David Frost's programme the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did not have a thought in his head about the phasing in of any of those changes. I asked the right hon. and learned Gentleman whether he knew that his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition would go to Luigi's restaurant and say what he said about phasing. The right hon. and learned Gentleman, who smiles at the idea, did not answer the question. We know why he did not answer. It was because he did not know. If he did know, he would say so. Will he say so now? Will he say that he knew what was going on at Luigi's?

Mr. John Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has spent a great deal of his speech talking about the Labour party's spending plans. Last night, on "Newsnight", Mr. Brendan Bruce, the former director of communications for the Tories, said:

"No-one sensible in the Tory Party actually believes the Labour Party would put up public spending by £37 billion".

If no one in the Tory party believes that, why should the public?

Mr. Mellor: The right hon. and learned Gentleman could have made the shortest speech that he has ever made in the House. He could have said, "Yes, I knew what was going on at Luigi's restaurant." We know that he did not know, and we know that the Leader of the Opposition went to Luigi's restaurant and achieved what, even for him, was a famous first. He became the first man in history to walk into a restaurant and trip over a ceiling.

When the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East went on television that night to clean up the mess that his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition had put him into again, he did not look pleased about it. He looked like a man who had just found that his tax returns had been filled in by Ken Dodd's accountant, or that Kitty Kelley was going to write his biography. He had his revenge today, though. He started talking about individuals' opinion poll ratings. I wonder why he made such a thing of that. Was it to say that his right hon. Friend's opinion poll rating was 20 per cent. below that of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? *[Interruption.]* Was that a way of getting his own back? *[Interruption.]* We heard what the Leader of the Opposition had to say about that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen in reasonable silence for the next two minutes.

Mr. Mellor: The Labour party does not like to know that it has been rumbled. Labour Members know that, whatever they may bray and shout in here, the public outside distrust them. The public know full well that the Labour party taxes and spends, taxes and spends. We will not give Labour the opportunity to do so.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division—

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends point out that the disgraceful barracking and shouting which came from the mob opposite during the reply was clearly an exercise orchestrated by the Labour Whips? It was because they are afraid of the public learning the truth about Labour's taxation policies.

Mr. Speaker: The noise in the Chamber tonight did not do the House great credit, but I do not think that it came from one side alone.

The House having divided: Ayes 233, Noes 320.

Division No. 49] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Carr, Michael
Allen, Graham	Cartwright, John
Alton, David	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Anderson, Donald	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Clelland, David
Armstrong, Hilary	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Cohen, Harry
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Ashton, Joe	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Corbett, Robin
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Corbyn, Jeremy
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Cousins, Jim
Barron, Kevin	Cox, Tom
Battle, John	Crowther, Stan
Beckett, Margaret	Cryer, Bob
Beith, A. J.	Cummings, John
Bell, Stuart	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Bellotti, David	Cunningham, Dr John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Dalyell, Tam
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Darling, Alistair
Bermingham, Gerald	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Blair, Tony	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Blunkett, David	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Boateng, Paul	Dewar, Donald
Boyes, Roland	Dixon, Don
Bradley, Keith	Dobson, Frank
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Doran, Frank
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Douglas, Dick
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Eadie, Alexander
Caborn, Richard	Eastham, Ken
Callaghan, Jim	Edwards, Huw
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Enright, Derek
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Canavan, Dennis	Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*

Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
George, Bruce
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim

Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.
Main Question put:—
The House divided: Ayes 317, Noes 227.

Division No. 50] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Galbraith, Sam
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Sir Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry

Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*

Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Killoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jack Thompson and Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the Autumn Statement presented by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on 6th November 1991; notes that the Government has continued to maintain firm control over public expenditure, while honouring its commitments in full and increasing spending in priority areas; and congratulates the Government on its sound and prudent economic policies, which have led to a substantial reduction in inflation and have laid the foundations for sustainable recovery.

Housing Support Grant (Scotland)

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I beg to move,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

I propose to keep my opening remarks brief. This is the 14th annual housing support grant order to have been laid before the House. Hon. Members will remember that housing support grant is a subsidy paid to those local authorities which, on the basis of reasonable assumptions about income and expenditure, would find it difficult to meet the costs of council housing from rental income. Full details of the grant settlement for next year are given in the order and the accompanying report.

I should like, as usual, to express my thanks to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, with which the grant settlement for next year has been discussed. Although COSLA has reservations about certain aspects of the settlement, I am grateful for the constructive and helpful approach that it takes in our annual discussions on these matters.

The draft order provides that the total grant payable next year will be £47·5 million. This sum represents the difference between the eligible expenditure and the relevant income of those authorities which, in the absence of grant, would have a deficit on their housing revenue accounts.

Eligible expenditure consists mainly of loan charges and management and maintenance spending. The loan charges that we estimate authorities will have to meet in the next financial year are, as usual, based on a projection of each authority's capital debt to the mid-point of the 1992-93 financial year, taking account of new borrowing and debt redemption.

In order to calculate interest charges, we apply to these projections of capital debt the pool interest rate expected for local authority debt in 1992-93. Our present estimate of this rate is 9·8 per cent. Interest rates may fluctuate, however, and I can assure the House that if there is a significant change in the estimate of the pool rate for 1992-93 we shall, as is normal, bring forward an appropriate variation order. For the moment, our estimate of loan charges for all authorities in 1992-93 is £505 million.

During this debate last year, a number of hon. Members—including the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—expressed their concern at the position of some authorities which, it was argued, faced average interest rates consistently higher than the pool rate of interest.

I discussed that matter with COSLA, and we gave serious consideration to a proposal to use individual estimates of the average interest rate that would apply to each authority. COSLA agreed, however, that the use of the standard pool rate should be retained, subject to changes in the system of prior year adjustments to ensure that differences between estimated and actual loan charges were more closely reflected in such adjustments. I welcome

that conclusion, to which COSLA agreed and which will mean that in future authorities are better protected against unexpected local variations in interest rates.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Can the Minister assure us that the changes, especially as they apply to Roxburgh, will mean a better deal than last year? We understand that these are provisional estimates, but the overall amount of money has been cut. There is widespread concern north of the border, especially in counties such as Roxburgh, that the allocations for next year will be less than they are for this year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The reason for the level of housing support grant is that the interest rates have come down. That factor was taken into account. What the hon. Gentleman, and the two other hon. Members to whom I referred, called for would have been to the disadvantage of the majority of authorities in Scotland, including Glasgow. However, we believe that it is possible to meet their point by adjusting the pool rate of interest and compensating those authorities where the estimates are found to be out. Action is being taken.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I should be interested to hear how the Minister arrived at an average interest rate figure of 9·8 per cent. I do not know anyone who can get that rate at present.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That is the estimate held by the Scottish Office but, as I said, if it is found to be incorrect, we will introduce a variation order—something that we have done before.

The other major item of expenditure to fall on housing revenue accounts is that on the management and maintenance of the housing stock. Our estimate of eligible management and maintenance spending in 1992-93 is based on an assumed average spending level of more than £526 per house. That represents a 15 per cent. increase over the equivalent average for the current year. It is the highest annual increase ever adopted for the grant calculations, and it provides evidence that the Scottish Office is prepared to make a real and growing contribution to the costs of providing improved services to council tenants.

There is a further aspect of eligible expenditure to which I draw the attention of the House. It concerns the way in which we have estimated the amounts of lost rental income arising from vacant houses. In previous years, that has been estimated with miscellaneous income on the rough-and-ready basis that it would form the same percentage of management and maintenance spending as it did in the year preceding the year in which the settlement was determined.

Lost rental income from vacant houses has been growing at an alarming rate—from £11·3 million in 1985-86 to more than £29·5 million in 1990-91—and authorities were automatically compensated through the grant system for that loss of income. Such a position could not be allowed to continue. The system has therefore been changed so that the Government's liability in respect of local authorities' lost rents will be limited to a set percentage of their overall rental income. For 1992-93, that has been set at 2·5 per cent.

I am satisfied that the 2·5 per cent. level takes adequate account of the numbers of vacant houses that arise in the normal course of local authorities activities as a landlord, as well as those houses being held empty for the purposes of comprehensive improvement schemes or demolition or disposal. More generally, I shall continue to urge local authorities to minimise the number of empty houses that they hold.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Like me, the Minister spent some time in local government. Does he recall sitting in his surgeries and listening to people saying, time after time, that they had refused houses? That is an exercise in choice. If people are exercising choice in that way, why should the local authority be penalised in the way that the Minister suggests?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The vast majority of authorities will not be affected this year. The policy is discouraging authorities from obtaining an increased number of empty houses. We believe that the 2·5 per cent. level is a reasonable assessment, taking into account all the circumstances. It is true that some houses will be vacant for decant, improvement and other purposes, but we believe that 2·5 per cent. of lost rental income is entirely reasonable when one takes into account all the factors.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall give way in a moment, but I wish to develop the arguments first.

As for standard rents, the assumed average rent for 1992-93 is £26·36 per house per week. That represents an increase of 10 per cent. above the assumed rent for the current year. I should stress that the rent figure of £26·36 is not a forecast of the actual average local authority rent for the next year; nor is it a guideline or recommendation to authorities. The figure of £26·36 is the average rent which, for the purpose of the grant calculations, we consider authorities should reasonably be expected to receive. The actual rent levels of individual authorities may be higher or lower depending on authorities' own decisions about income and expenditure. I shall discuss the implications of the subsidies settlement for actual rents later.

Dr. Reid: I am sorry to repeat the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), but I am afraid that the Minister did not answer it. It was an important point as regards not only the practice of council house lets but also the principle of freedom of choice. If the Minister believes in freedom of choice and if the tenant chooses not to have a house because of its condition, why should the council be penalised? Should not the Minister be investigating why houses are repeatedly refused and why the choice is exercised against taking them—often due to their bad condition? Should he not provide substantial means to upgrade those houses, rather than negate tenants' choice and penalise the council?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that the sums involved have been growing at an extremely alarming rate. As I said, in 1985-86, £11·3 million was lost in rental income because of empty houses. That figure has increased to £29·5 million. We believed that that trend should be arrested and authorities should be given maximum encouragement to bring empty houses back into use. If a house is

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uninhabitable and the council cannot do it up itself, the council should investigate other possibilities, through a housing association or the private sector.

I wish to mention the housing support grant arrangements for subsidising local authority hostels. Last year in this debate, I announced that hostel grant was being extended to all authorities with housing department hostels, and that 15 local authorities would qualify. I announced that additional capital resources were being made available to local authorities specifically to help them deal with homelessness. Some of those additional allocations have been invested in additional hostel provision.

To ensure that those new hostel grants are taken account of in the grant calculations, hostel grant has been yet again extended. We have thus been able to make a contribution to the net costs of new hostels in 1992-93. Those contributions have been based on the average cost per hostel bed space in Scotland as a whole. I recognise that the level of contribution may not cover 100 per cent. of the net costs of some of those new hostels, particularly in the case of a certain hostel in Edinburgh, where the annual running costs are more than £21,000 per hostel space. It would be unreasonable to expect the Government to fund hostel provision at such a level. Nevertheless, the overall hostel grant for 1992-93 of more than £1·6 million will be shared among 17 authorities, compared with £1·4 million among 15 authorities in the current financial year.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): The Minister will know that, due to the policy on selling council houses—which the Government have pushed heavily—many districts contain many elderly people who have never been able to purchase a house and are now dying off. The finances of those elderly people have been so severely reduced because of Government cuts that those residents have been unable to keep their houses in as good a condition as normal. The local authorities will have to return those houses to their normal standard before they can release them. Repossessions of houses bought by local people provide a further reason for local authorities to provide housing for homeless families.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Spending per council house is being maintained. I have visited the hon. Gentleman's district council, which has been working with Scottish Homes. He is right to say that the provision of adequate housing for the elderly is extremely important; but, in the settlement reached so far for this year and the provisional allocations, not only has spending per house been maintained but—over and above that—there is a further £21·9 million: £7·5 million for homelessness projects; £7·5 million for energy projects which can help the elderly; and £6·9 million for innovative projects in urban regeneration schemes.

General fund contributions represent a subsidy from community charge payers to council tenants. Such contributions are indiscriminate, in that they benefit all council tenants regardless of their circumstances, and they are unnecessary to the extent that tenants who are unable to meet the costs of their housing receive assistance in the form of housing benefit.

I therefore make no apology for our proposal that 49 of the 56 local housing authorities should be barred from estimating for such a contribution next year. The remaining authorities will be allowed to budget for varying levels of contribution, amounting in total to £1·5 million. The level of those contributions has been calculated as the amounts necessary to restrict the average rent increase in each of the authorities concerned to a maximum of 10 per cent.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): The Minister seems to be trying to skate over the serious problem of homelessness in Scotland. Is he oblivious to the fact that, according to Shelter, the homelessness figures in Scotland have more than doubled over the past seven years? The Scottish total is now well over 34,000 and in some areas —for example, Falkirk district, where at the last count there were more than 1,300 homeless applicants—local authorities have received hardly a penny over the past decade or so in housing support grant.

All that the order offers Falkirk district council is a relatively trivial amount for hostel accommodation. When will the Minister face up to his responsibilities, and do something for homeless people—such as giving every housing authority that requires housing support grant, and every housing authority that requires capital allocation, the necessary resources with which to build and maintain council housing and cater for homeless people throughout Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am glad to tell the hon. Gentleman that the bids for the £7·5 million that we have allocated for homelessness projects next year should be in by 7 February, and the allocation will then be made as soon as is practicable.

May I make a general point? The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities would have preferred to have complete discretion in regard to whether to use the funds for any other purpose, but Shelter welcomed the fact that specific projects had been called for, because it knew that the funds would definitely be used for those projects.

The effect of our subsidy proposals on local authority rent levels for 1992-93 will vary. I should make it clear that decisions on council rents are for local authorities. The majority of authorities do not receive housing support grant in respect of their council housing; nor do they make GFCs. Clearly, the subsidy proposals will have no direct effect on the rent decisions of those authorities.

As for the other authorities, changes in the level of subsidies from 1991-92 to 1992-93 will have a varying impact. In a number of cases, subsidies are a relatively minor component of housing revenue account income, and the influence of the subsidies decisions is likely to be outweighed by authorities' own decisions on, for example, management and maintenance spending. Even when subsidies form a sizeable proportion of housing revenue account income, it remains only one of a number of factors that need to be considered.

I should particularly draw the attention of the House to the expected expenditure of local authorities on loan charges, which amount to more than half of all local authority expenditure. Because of the decline in interest rates over the past 12 months, the loan charges payable by many authorities will be lower next year than this year. That should enable many local authorities to increase rents by relatively modest amounts, while still leaving room for real improvements in the level of management and maintenance spending. The general fund contributions

specified in the order will ease the position of those few authorities that face the need to increase rents by more than 10 per cent.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Further to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), there are 2,000 homeless people in my constituency. That number has shot up. My authority received £1·7 million in housing support grant for 1980-81. It has not received a penny for the last 12 years. Homelessness is increasing inexorably, but for 12 years there has been no housing support grant. How can the Minister possibly justify that?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Housing support grant is a deficit subsidy provided by the Government to bridge the gap between reasonable expenditure and reasonable income. In practice, the major factor that determines whether an authority qualifies is its level of outstanding capital debt per council house. When the hon. Gentleman's authority makes a bid in its housing plan for the homeless, that bid, together with the other bids for the £7·5 million, will be looked at with the greatest possible care.

The allocations that have so far been made are provisional. In previous years, the final allocations have always been considerably higher than the provisional allocations. The final allocations are due to be made in March. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) says that it is allocated to sales. What matters is how much is spent on housing stock in the public sector. More than £1 billion has been spent on public sector stock as a result of right-to-buy sales. That is why it is strongly welcomed throughout Scotland.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Does the Minister agree that he ought to have taken Shelter's advice that 84 children are being made homeless each day? The Minister is working on a £2·40 a week increase, but the average increase in Scotland is £2·50 to £3. Does he also agree that he has made a mistake in the estimates by saying that he has given £7·5 million to Scotland, when in reality he has stolen that sum? There is a £53 million shortfall.

The £47 million allocation is too low. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities says that it is short of £1·5 million. The Government are talking about spending £521 per house. COSLA is spending £541 per house. Next year, it will spend £600 per house. COSLA says that there is a £53 million shortfall. Therefore, the Government have not allocated £7·5 million to deal with the homeless.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman is not correct. The combined provisional allocation for 1991-92 for the housing revenue account and the non-housing revenue account was £520 million. The combined HRA and non-HRA for 1992-93 is £532 million —£12 million higher. Spending per council house is being maintained, and the £7·5 million for homelessness projects is over and above that—as is the £7·5 million for energy projects, for which the hon. Gentleman's authority will be bidding.

Mr. Maxton: Not true.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I assure the hon. Gentleman that it most certainly is true.

The analysis of the relatively modest impact of the subsidies settlement on local authority rents would appear to be confirmed by those authorities which have already settled their rent levels for 1992-93. In particular, I note that Glasgow has opted for an average increase of about 7 per cent., while Edinburgh is considering an increase in the range of 5 to 7 per cent. The hon. Members for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) will be aware that the increase in that city will be 6·5 per cent.

The proposals made tonight constitute a fair and reasonable subsidies package. They set out an acceptable balance between the interests of the council tenant, the community charge payer and the national taxpayer. We have consulted local authorities about the order and I strongly commend it to the House.

10.49 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I suppose that the only good thing that could be said about that speech is that it will be the last one that the Minister will make before the election in his present role as Minister responsible for housing. It is the last one that he will make because he will be returning to the Bar thereafter. God help the criminals that he will defend. I have a great deal of sympathy for them.

As the Government stagger towards defeat in the election, I thought that because this was the Minister's last speech we might just have had a contrite speech which at least recognised that over 13 years he and his Government had created a major housing crisis in Scotland. It is a crisis which has led to a deterioration in our housing stock, to which my hon. Friends have referred in terms of housing support grant for empty properties.

The most ridiculous position with regard to empty properties is in Castlemilk where hundreds of houses are standing empty as part of a redevelopment programme that is at least partly financed by the Government. Glasgow district council is losing housing support because those houses are standing empty and bringing in no rental income. What an absurd position. It is also the case in other partnership areas.

Our housing stock has deteriorated. Fewer and fewer houses are being built in the public sector. Our houses are increasingly damp. As my hon. Friends pointed out, there is an ever-increasing number of homeless people. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) was right when he said that Shelter's figure showed that the number of homeless people had reached 34,000. But let us remember that that figure does not include young homeless people living rough, in hostels or on the streets in both Scotland and London. The figure includes only those people who are accepted by local authorities as homeless. Of course, we also have ever-rising rent levels.

The Minister's speech was, as ever, bland, inadequate and complacent. We have come to expect that from the Minister, as we did from his predecessors. As ever, he says that all is well. He says that he is allowing local authorities to spend enough money to fulfil housing needs in their area. That is a travesty and a farce. Let me give some of the facts and compare next year with this year and with those for the whole period of the Government. Let us look first at basic figures for the total resources that local authorities in Scotland will have to spend on housing in the coming year. As the Minister said, the general fund contribution has been reduced from £2·2 million to £1·5 million.

[Mr. John Maxton]

The Minister made much play of how he was improving housing support grant. It has been reduced from £55 million to £47·5 million. Capital consents—which are not part of the order but will be very much part of the overall expenditure on housing in the next 12 months—have been reduced from £453 million to £412 million. Of course, there is the £120 million for the non-housing revenue account. But local authority expenditure on capital allocations has been reduced from £453 million to £412 million.

Local authorities expected a rise at least equivalent to inflation, which would have meant a rise in total housing expenditure from £510 million this year to £531 million next year. Instead, it has been reduced to £461 million. The Minister made great claims about the £7 million increase, but total housing expenditure for local authorities, the statutory providers of accommodation for homeless people, is being reduced. That is a farce. In real terms, the Government are making a cut of £70 million.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): I have two district councils in my constituency—part of Hamilton district council and Clydesdale council. Hamilton's housing expenditure is being cut by more than £1·8 million and Clydesdale's by £1·1 million. How can the Minister say that he is trying to help homeless people when he is cutting the means of helping them?

Mr. Maxton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As he knows, I live in Hamilton and am aware of its housing problems.

Mr. Graham: Is my hon. Friend aware that, since the start of the year, 300 houses a day have been repossessed? In Scottish terms, we are talking about 30 houses a day. Over a 10-day period, 300 houses, which people are desperately trying to get from local authorities, will have been repossessed. The Government say they are tackling homelessness. What a travesty!

Mr. Maxton: Absolutely. I shall return to repossessions, about which I recently received an interesting letter from the Minister.

The Government have been in office for almost 13 years, but 11 years ago housing support grant stood at £228 million. The general fund contribution provided a further £100 million, but is now down to £1·5 million. In the early 1980s, housing support grant and the general fund contribution provided £328 million, but next year they will provide only £49 million. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities estimates that since 1979 £1·5 billion of direct Government support has been cut from housing in Scotland.

Those are cash figures. In real terms, the facts are more catastrophic. In 1979, 47 per cent. of housing costs came from rents, 39 per cent. from housing support grant and 14 per cent. from rate fund contribution. This year, 93 per cent. will come from rents, 7 per cent. from housing support grant and only 1 per cent. from the general fund contribution. Housing costs rely almost entirely on rents paid by tenants. Rents have risen from an average of £4·92p in 1979 to an average of £23·18p this year and COSLA expects the average increase to be between £2·50p and £3—an increase of 10 per cent., when the Government estimate inflation to be 4·1 per cent.

Since 1979, rents have risen by more than 370 per cent. —much more than the rate of inflation. Local authorities can do little to improve their housing stock. They cannot build sheltered housing for the increasing number of elderly people. Tenants with major dampness in their houses, with all the ill health that that can lead to, particularly among children, are told that although the council would like to do something it does not have the money to do so.

The capital allocation position is more farcical than housing revenue support. Gross allocation has been cut by £41 million, but the net consent—the money local authorities know they can spend at the beginning of the financial year on housing developments—has been cut by £71 million, or 34 per cent. They have to make up the rest from the sale of council houses.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): My hon. Friend refers to council house sales and capital allocations. What would he say to a local authority such as that in my constituency which, we understand from the orders, is expected to have capital receipts from council house sales of £8·346 million but which will be allowed to spend only £6·587 million on building new houses and on capital expenditure? That is a negative capital allocation. In view of the fact that East Lothian has more than its fair share of repossessions and subsequent homelessness, why on earth are the Government taking money for house building away from it?

Mr. Maxton: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I was coming to that point. The most ridiculous aspect is that eight local authorities in Scotland now have a minus net allocation. Their gross allocation is less than what the Government expect them to obtain from the sale of council houses. Perhaps the Government will say what happens to the surplus money. Where does it go? Who is allowed to spend it? Does it go to the Exchequer? That would be ridiculous as it is a local priority to spend the money.

The Minister and I were members of the Committee that dealt with the Bill which introduced the right to buy. I remember the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), and his junior Minister, the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), saying that the great thing about the right to buy was that local authorities would have more money to spend on housing. The money received was to be an extra, not taken off local authorities' other allocations. If the local authorities sold houses, they would at least have extra money to spend. However, that is not what is happening. The receipts have now become a substitute for spending consents rather than an addition. Eight authorities in Scotland are now in the ludicrous position of having to sell more council houses to get more money than they are being allowed to spend.

We are in the middle of a major economic recession and the private housing sector is on the verge of collapse. How are people who face unemployment and short-time working suddenly going to be able to buy their council houses if they did not do so previously? The impact of the most recent increases in discounts is rapidly wearing off and the Government's latest announcement is a major blow to local authorities and their tenants. Housing

departments cannot plan their repair and redevelopment programmes on this basis, let alone start building new houses.

The orders and capital allocations will do nothing to help to solve Scotland's housing problems. In particular, they will do nothing to help the growing number of homeless people. The Minister has made great play of the £7 million. As I said, there is a cut in capital allocations of £71 million. The way to solve the problem of homelessness is to bring the empty houses about which he is so concerned back into use by redeveloping them, to get rid of the dampness and to allocate them to homeless people.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham) said, the orders do not help people facing repossession of their homes by mortgage companies because they cannot afford the payments. I recently wrote to the Minister about the problem and asked him to give extra resources to local authorities in the form of capital allocations—that is nothing more than the right to borrow—so that more local authorities could take up the excellent scheme piloted by Clackmannan district council. It is worth quoting the Minister's reply. It states:

"It is true that I have welcomed the Clackmannan scheme but it is important to remember that that district council have chosen to commit their own resources to that scheme in the light of their judgment of local needs and priorities. It is open to other local authorities to do likewise within the existing level of resources available to them."

The Minister is nodding. Thus he is saying that any money for such schemes must come from the same capital allocations which he has savagely cut this year. In other words, local authorities must choose between using the money to help someone facing repossession, and redeveloping a damp house and getting rid of the dampness, or perhaps building sheltered housing, rewiring the houses and doing other works on them. That is a farce, and the Minister knows it.

The Minister went on to say:

"Individuals entered freely into their mortgage commitments and it would be inappropriate for the public sector to provide additional resources to assist anyone who got into difficulty."

That was said by a Minister who, with his colleagues, has for 13 years bribed, cajoled and blackmailed people into buying their homes—a Minister whose Government's only housing policy has been obsessively to foster home ownership. Now, like Pontius Pilate, he wants to wash his hands of the problems that he has created. He is happy to allow local authorities to use their scarce resources to help, but he stands aside and does nothing.

As I have said, the one ray of hope in the debate is that this is the last time that the Minister will stand at that Dispatch Box presenting a housing support grant order. The sooner the election comes the better, so that we can begin the task of bringing sanity and concern back to Scottish housing.

11.6 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): We have just listened to the standard speech that we hear regularly from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). Perhaps when my hon. Friend the Minister replies to the debate, he will tell the House how much public money is spent on housing in Scotland. It is important to understand that local authorities are not the only providers of housing in Scotland. Vast sums of public money go into other areas—I include housing benefit, because that is taxpayers' money that goes straight into the housing coffers, to the benefit of the individuals who qualify. It is public money.

As in our other debates with them, the Opposition deal in what I call Monopoly money, or fairy tale money. Opposition Members talk about how they will spend it and what they will do, but when they are asked how they will finance their plans they find that they cannot give us straight and relevant answers.

I welcome my hon. Friend's initiative on empty properties. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have felt for many years that too many properties in the control of Scottish local authorities remained empty for far too long. I have mentioned the housing developments in my home town of Dundee before, and I do so again, because those developments have pioneered ideas of what to do with properties that people did not previously want to live in. Such initiatives require support.

I am delighted to hear that the hon. Member for Cathcart acknowledges that the Government and the local authority are collaborating in his constituency so that unpopular properties in which people did not want to live may be renovated and brought back into use. That is a sensible use of resources.

I welcome the Government's recognition that, if we are to deal with the problem of homelessness, funds must be allocated specifically for the task. It is fairly clear that, if the funds were allocated generally, with local authorities left to make the decisions, they would not give homelessness the priority that they could and should have done—they have not done so in the past.

That is also true of the way in which local authorities refused over many years to acknowledge defects in houses. At one time they pretended that defects did not exist. Conservative Members, and some other hon. Members who have taken a direct interest in such matters, know that some local authorities pretended that conditions such as dampness did not exist. We discovered that a long time ago, when we carried out an inquiry into dampness. Until we exposed the problems, local authorities were telling us that there were none.

Mr. Graham: What could they do?

Mr. Walker: What could be done? The hon. Gentleman must be aware of the scale of the problem and the fact that we did not have direct control of decision making. That is why I welcome the £7·5 million being allocated positively for specific projects. For too long we allowed the decisions to be made locally. Sadly, that did not operate to the benefit of the people, partly because of policies that, at the time, were deemed to keep rents down for everyone. That is why I have always—I make no apology for this—said that I welcome the use of housing benefit as a means of directing funds to those in need, thus preventing the funds going to those not in need. That is the proper way to help people in need.

Mr. Maxton: What about mortgage tax relief?

Mr. Walker: The hon. Gentleman mentions mortgage tax relief. He has never understood the difference between allowing people to keep their own money and spending taxpayers' money. The hon. Gentleman has no understanding of finance and he makes that clear every

[Mr. Walker]

time that he speaks. That is why I believe that, contrary to what he thinks, my hon. Friend the Minister will be on the Front Bench for a long time.

11.10 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister, who is usually courteous in giving way, refused to give way to me in his opening remarks. I can only think that he was afraid—not of the figures in the order, but of the figure of 1,234, which is his majority over the Liberal Democrats in Edinburgh, West.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) has set out to the House the basic figures which form the backdrop to our debate. They show the drop, if one takes inflation into account, of £71 million in the cash available for investment in public housing in Scotland.

That is happening when, as has already been said, homelessness is rising, and it is widely accepted that the quality of housing and the number of houses below tolerable standard in Scotland have been grossly underestimated for many years. One need only think of the report last month from the Public Accounts Committee. In the 44 per cent. of Scottish housing surveyed, the number of houses deemed to be below tolerable standard was up to the level on which the Scottish Office had operated in respect of Scotland as a whole.

Against that background, we are discussing a further cut in the resources available to our local authorities for housing. In the housing support grant itself, there is a reduction of 14 per cent. and there is a reduction of 34 per cent. in the net capital consents for 1992-93.

I repeat the question put by the hon. Member for Cathcart. The Government expect an increase in the sales of council houses in the next year. On what basis are the estimates made? Can the Minister also tell us, for the most recent year for which figures are available, how the receipts compare with what the Government estimated for the year ahead? Judging from the local authority representations made to my hon. Friends and from a letter from Ettrick and Lauderdale district council to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the local authorities cannot see how, especially at a time of recession and repossessions, people will make the financial commitment to buy their own houses. The Minister owes it to the House to explain how the figures have been arrived at.

Homelessness is a growing problem. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) mentioned a figure of 34,500. That is the number of households that, in 1990-91, applied to the local authority as homeless under the statutory provisions. The number of people who are homeless is far greater than that. Some 84 children per working day have been made homeless in the most recent year for which figures are available. That is intolerable. Yet, against that background, we get fewer resources for local authorities to meet the challenge of housing.

Hon. Members may think that I am fortunate, because both islands councils in my constituency are receiving some housing support grant, which is more than can be said for some local authorities in Scotland. In Orkney, where there has been a waiting list increase of 30 per cent. in the last five years and where, because of high rents in the private sector, more and more people are looking to the local authority to provide housing to let at costs which can be afforded, there is a reduction of £200,000 in housing support grant for the coming year. That has prompted a doubling of the rent increase initially proposed for Orkney tenants. The council has a relatively small debt, yet it believes that, because of its prudence in trying to keep the debt down, it is being penalised.

The question that I wanted to ask the Minister, when he would not give way, applies to my constituency and to that of the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). It is estimated that, in the islands, building costs are 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. higher than in mainland Scotland. The Minister said that £526 per house had been taken into acount for repair and maintenance costs. COSLA believes that the amount being spent this year is £541 per house. Even allowing for the grand gesture of the 15 per cent. increase, it will still not meet what is being spent per house in 1991-92. If we take inflation into account, the amount is estimated to go up to £602 per house. Grossed up, there is a shortfall of £53 million.

The Minister referred to an average. In the islands, I am talking about costs which are 30 per cent. to 40 per cent. above the average. There is nothing in the report which goes with the order to show that any consideration has been given to those substantially higher building costs. I hope that the Minister will respond to that when he replies to the debate.

In the case of Shetland, there is £4·59 for housing support grant, mostly reflecting the high debt charges which occurred as a result of the enormous building programme which Shetland islands council had to incur to meet the challenge of the oil industry and the terminal coming to Sullom Voe. That programme was carried out on behalf of the nation, but the debt charges continue.

The total capital consents for the HRA allocation for Shetland this year are only 70 per cent. of what was requested. Having been prudent in times past, and having tried to make realistic assessments of the housing programme, the council is being penalised. Before the storms of 1 January, the council had already realised that those living in caravans would have to be rehoused in better accommodation, yet the resources being made available will hardly help the council to start to address that problem, although it will make every effort to do so.

No doubt the Minister will recognise that weather conditions in the islands are another contributory factor to the higher building costs, because higher standards are needed to withstand the weather. To date, the Minister has responded in negative terms to the appeals for an increase in the capital allocations, both for the housing revenue account and for the non-HRA capital consents. He has indicated that the matter may be considered sympathetically if more money is available later.

I stress that considerable costs will be incurred even when insurance has been taken into account. I think I am right in saying that a cost of £500 per house has to be met by the council before the damage is covered by insurance. That will lead to a substantial cost. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind should resources become available.

On homelessness, £7 million has been set aside for specific projects. As the hon. Member for Cathcart has pointed out, it is being taken away with one hand and given back with the other. No doubt that was done with a fanfare to pretend that the Government are trying to do something about homelessness.

I stand corrected if I am wrong—I hope that I am wrong—but it has been put to me that some of the projects which the Minister has said have to be submitted by local authorities must be projects which are not already in their capital programmes. One wonders what the Scottish Office thinks local authorities are doing if they are not already trying their best to make provision for the homeless and to cover some of those things in their capital programmes.

The Minister is encouraging some projects to be taken out and resubmitted so that specific funds identified for homelessness can be put forward, and trying to give the impression that the Government care about homelessness. We know, and the figures show beyond any shadow of doubt, that, as the crisis of homelessness mounts in urban and rural areas in Scotland, the Government's response has been to cut, cut and cut expenditure again. That has been a policy of failure over the past 12 years. For the sake of the homeless, if for no one else, the sooner the Government go the better.

11.20 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Once again, we have had to listen to the Minister's complacent view of the Scottish housing scene. He places rose-tinted spectacles on his nose and gives us the view that his Department is available only to those who enter the Scottish Office and see matters from its point of view.

I wish to refer to the city of Glasgow and the people whom I represent. Time and again, the people of the city of Glasgow are hammered by the Government's housing policies. We have some of the worst housing conditions in the developed world, yet that is not bad enough for the Minister. He is concerned with inflicting continuing pain and suffering. Last September, he announced that, for 1992-93, housing support grant would not be given to local authorities for rents lost through houses being empty if the total amount lost was more than 2·5 per cent. of rental income. Glasgow's housing department estimates that for 1992-93 it will have 5·7 per cent. voids, or an average of 7,700 houses—a lost-rents budget of more than £10·5 million. That is not through choice.

The Scottish Office has said that the total amount of housing support grant withdrawn will be about £1·7 million—that is the total for the whole of Scotland—of which no less than £1·6 million will be borne by the city of Glasgow. That alone will add about 24p a week to the average rent of council tenants in Glasgow. That angers people in the housing department, because almost half the total voids in the city exist not because the council does not want to let them but as a result of tenants' decants, improvements, demolitions or transfers to developers or co-operatives. People are particularly angered because the Scottish Office enthusiastically supports the initiatives. It is no wonder that housing department officials in Glasgow, as well as councils, are incensed that the Minister is using housing support grant to penalise the council for pursuing initiatives.

The Minister's arguments are utterly perverse. He reduces subsidy as a means of penalising the city of Glasgow for carrying out the housing strategy which the Government purport to support. That contradiction in terms is compounded, first, because Glasgow has been making determined attempts to reduce those voids. The council reduced the total number of voids in its stock—the empty houses—by 11 per cent. over the past year. Secondly, it reduced the total number of lettable voids —the Minister will appreciate the differentiation between total voids and those that are lettable—by 27 per cent. over the past year. The council is improving its position, yet it is still being hammered.

The third reason why that inflicted reduction is a disgrace is that it is shot through with hypocrisy. At the same time as councils have been told that they must limit their voids to 2·5 per cent.—they are being hammered if they do not—an entirely different approach or a more relaxed regime is being applied to Scottish Homes. I have in my possession a letter from Mr. Peter McKinlay, the chief executive of Scottish Homes, in which he admits—he has no secret to hide—that

"as at 29 December 1991 we had 2,016 houses void out of a total directly factored stock of 56,248 houses."

That comes to 3·7 per cent. of Scottish Homes' stock, but no action has been taken against it; there is no restriction on what it can spend. It is a matter of double standards: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. I hope that the Minister will make some attempt to explain that appalling situation and say why Glasgow and other authorities—Clydebank and Shetland are the other two —are kept in that position while Scottish Homes is allowed to get away with it. It is utter hypocrisy. I shall happily let the Minister answer that point now, if he wishes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the portable discount scheme which Scottish Homes operates has been made available to tenants who live in tied houses? He should bear that factor in mind.

Mr. Watson: I am glad that the Minister mentioned the portable discount scheme, because this letter goes on to talk about it, and it might interest him. He has not, of course, answered my question. Evidently, the portable discount scheme is so popular that the total number of sales in Scotland under the scheme was 12 in 1989-90, 74 in 1990-91 and 32 to date. That is hardly any explanation whatever of the preferential situation, and it is not a fair comparison.

We should give the Minister some credit. He had, we understand, a distinguished record in his earlier years as a boxer. That is something for which he might well take credit. I suggest that he can take absolutely no credit now for this situation where the Marquess of Queensberry's rules have been cast aside. In a boxing match, if a boxer knocks someone down he is forced to retreat; the Minister advances on people that he has knocked down and he puts the boot in good and proper.

I wish to give one personal example which I came across a week ago. Mrs. Brenda McDonald, who lives in Queen Elizabeth square in the Gorbals, suffers the most appalling housing conditions one can imagine. Dampness is rife, wallpaper hangs off the walls and two of the four rooms are utterly uninhabitable. Her children had been sent home from school because their clothes were smelling. They did not smell because they were dirty. Mrs. McDonald is scrupulous in cleaning them, and it takes days to dry washing in the house that she is forced to occupy. They smelled of the dampness that pervades that house, and it almost made me sick when I visited her.

Those are the conditions in which the people in Glasgow are living, but that is completely ignored by the type of story that we heard from the Minister this evening. It is simply not good enough. Of course, this is his last

[Mr. Watson]

appearance at the Dispatch Box, but when will he understand housing in Scotland? He shows a complete lack of knowledge and understanding. He inhabits a different world. When the election comes, the people of Scotland will show what they think of his performance.

11.26 pm

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): As an hon. Member for Edinburgh, the Minister should be well aware of the housing crisis in Edinburgh. The scale of homelessness in Scotland is a national scandal, and nowhere is it worse than in the capital city itself. Time and again I have experience in my surgery of people with the most desperate housing circumstances, people who, 15 years ago, I know, would have been offered council housing without difficulty but who now find it impossible to get a house.

The underlying reasons for that are the failure of public investment in housing stock, the failure of the Government to provide adequate support for housing in Edinburgh and the selling-off of council houses without them being replaced by other public sector houses.

In 1979-80 Edinburgh received over £11 million in housing support grant. That was phased out within a few years, and for a considerable number of years we have had no housing support grant—I will come to the hostel support grant, to which the Minister referred, in a minute. That £11 million in 1979-80 would have bought a lot more housing and paid for a lot more building work than one could ever get today for that money. I asked the Minister how much that was in 1991-92 prices, and it is £26 million. That is a measure of the shortfall: £26 million at current prices that we were receiving in 1979-80 in housing support grant. When this is multiplied over, say, a 10-year period, it comes to £260 million. That is an indication of the lack of support for public sector housing in Edinburgh.

The Minister spoke about the hostel support grant which he now provides to Edinburgh. It is quite inadequate. The Minister may refer to the high revenue costs of the proposed third hostel in Randolph crescent. That hostel will be in addition to the hostels at Leith and Greyfriars. The hostel support grant that the Minister plans to provide in the next financial year will hardly be enough to pay the revenue costs of the two existing hostels. I appeal to the Minister to face up to that and at the minimum to give sympathetic consideration to the representations that he has already received from Edinburgh district council about an increase in that small housing support grant for hostels.

With regard to the housing revenue capital allocation, we in Edinburgh have a real grievance in respect of the provisional gross allocation for 1992-93. Edinburgh does not believe that it has any chance of achieving the targets for receipts. In recent years Edinburgh has broadly hit its targets, but it believes that it has no chance of achieving the Government's targets in 1992-93. By any test the gross provisional allocation represents a cut. In real terms, housing revenue block provisional allocation will represent a cut.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: How does the hon. Gentleman believe that I could justify spending 20 times more than the national average—20 times more than on anywhere else in Scotland—on the hostel at Randolph crescent?

Mr. Strang: If the Minister wants to sit down and talk to representatives of the district council about the costs of running that hostel, that would be fine. No doubt he could ask his officials to do that. However, the proposed money is not even sufficient for the other two hostels. There is nothing in the proposed hostel grant for the next financial year for the third hostel because the money is only sufficient for the first two. The Minister may not want to cover the total costs of running the third hostel, but surely the Government could at least increase the figure as a contribution towards the running of that hostel.

The Minister must be aware of the disgraceful situation in relation to the modernisation of our older tenements in Edinburgh and the utterly inadequate allocation for repairs and improvement grants. The Minister's gross allocation for that in 1992-93 is £24 million. No less than £12 million of that has been earmarked for the pre-1984 application backlog. A further £9 million has been allocated for the backlog in 1993-94.

Even in housing action areas like Portobello in my constituency, people who were assured that their repair grants would be paid in the current year have had their works halted. There are cuts in this year's repairs and improvements which are desperately required and which should be going ahead.

The test in relation to the improvement grants is how many houses have been improved. I received a parliamentary answer to a question that I tabled last November. It shows that in 1989-90 the average number of dwellings that received modernisations and improvements was 538. In the previous three years the average was 776.

Over the past two years when I have spoken to officials and my constituents I have said that, just as in the run-up to the 1987 election, in the run-up to this election we will find that the money will start to flow and with a bit of luck we might get more repairs and improvements. In fact, the opposite has happened: the money has not been made available. One of the most effective ways of getting building workers off the dole—there are many who are in that position in Edinburgh—is to step up improvement and repair grants.

The Government must accept a large share of the responsibility for the housing disaster in Edinburgh because of their failure to provide the financial support that the district council has warranted.

11.35 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): I wish to make only a short contribution to the debate. I have been the leader of a local authority, I served within local government for 16 years and for many years I was a housing chairman.

I have spent a great deal of time in Scotland—even the new year—and I have seen much badly designed and ugly municipal housing as I have travelled within the country. In some areas there is a high density of population and badly maintained housing stock. Council tenants have rights, and someone must speak up for those tenants whether they live in Scotland, England or Wales. If resources come from central Government and the housing stock is not managed properly—for example, painting properties and repairing gutters regularly—what happens?

When several years pass and it is decided that the properties should be painted, the workmen say, "We can't paint these window frames and those doors because the wood has rotted. That has happened because they have been neglected for so long." They are then neglected for another few years, but in the end it costs a great deal—more than regular maintenance would have cost—to repair the doors and windows.

The answer is not always to throw resources at a problem. The problem often lies with local councillors and local government officers who let down council tenants by not using the resources which are provided to undertake the work for which they were earmarked.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dickens: I shall not give way because I want to be brief.

There are many—particularly Opposition Members—who would like to condemn people to live in council houses for the rest of their lives, to pay rent until they are in their graves and to have nothing to sell so that they can leave money to their children or be in a position to buy a retirement home. I often wonder whether part of the hidden agenda is to abolish home ownership. I have suspected that for some time, and the electorate should be warned.

Scottish Members should stop moaning about the resources that Scotland is given. Tell local councillors and local government officers to use the moneys for what they were intended. Council tenants have rights, and if they are withheld we shall fail those people and the people of Scotland generally.

11.37 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I am disappointed that the Minister has once again attacked local authorities throughout Scotland, and especially Glasgow district council. He spoke of houses that are lying empty, but he must know that many tenants want some houses to remain empty so that there is a choice of housing. If there are no vacant houses and a family suddenly becomes homeless, or a property is destroyed in a storm, only hostel accommodation will be available, not decent housing.

The Minister is a former councillor and he must know that when tenants see their councillor or Member they do not say, "I want a local authority house." They express a wish for a local authority house in the community in which they were born and in which their mothers and fathers have remained. There are some who want sheltered housing while others want multi-storey dwellings or a property with a garden in which their children can play. It stands to reason that, if a local authority is a responsible authority, there is bound to be some empty housing stock.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) was right to say that the Government have asked Glasgow and many other authorities to become involved in new housing initiatives. Sometimes they mean demolition, and there will have to be decanting until the co-operatives that my hon. Friend has in Castlemilk are ready. In my limited experience of local government, the only way that there can be decanting of property is by having some empty housing stock. Glasgow has property such as Easterhouse and Drumchapel, which were built at the time of the Wheatley housing reforms.

The then Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, said that he would build so many houses a week. He forced local authorities to build houses, many of which were not traditional in structure. Many of my constituents have taken up the right-to-buy option. In one case, the Government had to buy back the properties because they had been built with aluminium. There was such corrosion in those dwellings that it was only fair that the Government should buy them back. When those houses fall down around the tenants—and they will—the local authority will have to rehouse them. They will say, "We have been 20 years in this area, and we want decent housing." The Minister must be fair.

I am a little sick of hearing the Minister and Conservative Members saying that, where there are rent rises—there will be rent rises in Glasgow because of the Government's decision—they will look after the people in need through the rent rebate system. I do not want to mention anyone's name, because I do not have permission to do so, but there is a railway driver living around the corner from me. He is out at 3 am, sometimes at 5 am, and sometimes at 2 pm the following day. He works whatever overtime he can get. His wife works hard in a local newsagent shop. They are not entitled to rebate. When there is a rent rise, couples like that are hit. They work hard to get something extra for the family, to have a decent holiday or perhaps to put their children through further education.

The sneaky thing about the order is that it will be Glasgow district council that will get the blame for the rent rises, not the Minister or the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). Every official to whom I have spoken has said that, because of the Government's decision, services will decline. The Conservatives are supposed to be the party of law and order. The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) is always talking about law and order. I have more multi-storey dwellings in my constituency than any other hon. Member. Old-age pensioners are frightened because there is no concierge service.

Mr. Dickens: Who built those houses?

Mr. Martin: I do not want to digress, but the houses were built because the local authority was put under pressure when the then Tory Government said, "Build multi-storey dwellings if you want support grant." Both the Government and the local authority built those dwellings.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Who got the profits?

Mr. Martin: That is another story.

No matter who built those dwellings, pensioners are frightened, and they would appreciate the protection of a concierge service. They will not get it, because of the Minister's statement tonight.

Every police officer to whom I have spoken has said that street lighting and communal lighting is important in the prevention of crime. The housing authority is responsible for communal lighting, and I know that if the

[Mr. Martin]

proposal is adopted, when the lighting fails on a Friday night, it will not be returned for the pensioners until Monday—if they are lucky.

We are all committed to improving services for tenants regardless of whether they are owner-occupiers or council tenants. However, we can never achieve that objective if the Government keep squeezing local authorities who are dedicated to improving services. The most important requirement after heat and food is a decent home. The facts show that 90 per cent. of our problems relate to housing. It is important that everyone has a decent home, and the Minister should provide that.

11.46 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) referred to his home town of Dundee, which he has now left—to the great delight of Dundonians across the city. He paid tribute to the pioneering work that has been carried out by the Labour council in Dundee, and I think that he was referring to the Whitfield partnership between central Government and local government, and the private sector. I agree with the hon. Member that the council and central Government should be congratulated on the work that has been carried out in the Whitfield district.

However, the hon. Gentleman failed to mention that the work was made possible by huge injections of public cash. All that work required massive public investment by central Government and local government—which is precisely what the order does not allow. Setting up housing co-ops and refurbishing and modernising blocks requires public investment. Even if the private sector is to start to build houses, it will require grants, and blocks will have to be demolished and land given over to it at virtually no cost.

If there is a lesson to be learned from Whitfield, it is that the housing problems facing the people of Scotland will not be tackled effectively until the Government release the resources to enable councils to begin to do so—something which all Conservative Members and Ministers ignore time and time again.

There are only four partnership districts in Scotland, and they were set up not as trail blazers for what would happen across Scotland in future, but as window dressing. They provide Ministers with somewhere to take the press and media, so that they can turn up for half an hour or an hour in the morning, have their picture taken beside the latest improvement and then disappear. Outside those partnership districts, the housing conditions are disgraceful—there is dampness and disrepair everywhere. The Government ignore those problems, as they can show off the partnership districts to the media.

The Secretary of State's report accompanying the order referred to the aggregate amount of housing support grant being the difference between two estimates that the Secretary of State for Scotland has to make: first, the eligible expenditure for a housing authority and, secondly, the likely relevant income. The formula was applied to Dundee, and the Secretary of State concluded that Dundee's income exceeded its eligible expenditure, so Dundee should not receive any housing support grant.

There is nothing new in that fact. Dundee has not received any housing support grant since 1982-83. In every one of nine years, Dundee has been denied that grant by the Government because the Secretary of State for Scotland always estimates that the income going into the housing revenue account was more than the council needed to spend in the Dundee district.

The Minister has been round Dundee with me and looked at the terrible housing problems it faces. He has been to districts such as Mid-Craigie and Beechwood, and he knows perfectly that there is a crying need for further investment in those areas. The only reason that the council does not spend money on those districts is that they do not have it—it has been denied them by the Government. However, the Minister can ignore that reality because he has a neat and tidy formula contained in the rate support grant order which allows him to persuade himself that Dundee has more money than it needs when, in reality, it does not have nearly enough money to do what is required.

According to the order, the estimated expenditure on repairs and maintenance per house should be £396·43. People in Dundee would be very pleased to be told that, in the coming year, the council would be able to spend that amount on their houses; but the reality is very different. Apart from the cost of repairs and maintenance, the council must meet the repayments on the capital building carried out in previous years. That means that there is far less to spend on improvements.

Government legislation also prevents Dundee district council from carrying out improvements that it wishes to make to certain properties. The Minister will know—because I have written to him about it—that, as a result of the Government's right-to-buy policy, communal properties exist where owner-occupiers and council tenants live side by side.

The Government are aware of the problems that can arise in such circumstances. They know that, when essential repairs and maintenance have to be carried out, owner-occupiers are legally obliged to bear their share of the cost incurred by the council. If they refused, they could be taken to court and forced to pay. That obligation, however, does not extend to the cost of improvements.

In a recent case in Dundee, damp was invading a number of deck-access blocks with flat roofs, and the council decided to install pitched roofs instead. One owner-occupier, however, did not simply refuse to pay his share; he could not pay. The council sought legal advice, but discovered that it could not take the owner-occupier to court. The court would not have found in its favour, because the law obliged owner-occupiers to pay their share only of essential repair and maintenance costs. The council considered paying the owner-occupier's share itself, but was told that it had not the legal authority to do so. Thus, the Government have prevented the council from improving the block concerned: it is a shambles and a disgrace.

I wrote to the Minister, asking him what he was going to do about the matter. He replied with a lot of waffle that had nothing to do with the problem; the problem itself he dealt with in a single sentence:

"I am not in a position to comment on the District Council's decision, which I know has been taken in the light of legal advice."

The Minister is walking away from his responsibilities. Some of my hon. Friends have pointed out that this is his last opportunity to speak from the Dispatch Box on a housing support grant order, but I will go further: it is the last opportunity that any Minister will have. There will be

a general election in a few months' time, and there will be a Labour Government after that general election—and a Scottish Parliament.

11.52 pm

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall look into the points made by the hon. Members for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) and for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) about Scottish Homes' empty stock. I should make the general point that the final allocations in previous years have been substantially up on the provisional allocations. What hon. Members have said will be taken into account, however, and I am happy to see any hon. Member who has legitimate points to make about matters of pressing urgency.

As for the homelessness allocations, we shall take very seriously what all bidding authorities say in their representations, and we shall announce the allocations as soon as possible so that the necessary steps can be taken. As a result of the bids already received earlier this year, some 700 units have been provided for homeless people. We believe that that figure can be more than doubled, and that it will be generally welcomed in Scotland.

I was asked why Dundee does not receive housing support grant. Dundee's outstanding capital debt per house is only £3,814, which is well below the Scottish average of £5,052.

Several hon. Members asked about empty housing. We believe that the 2·5 per cent. rents-lost assumption makes reasonable allowance for temporary vacancies during redevelopment, as in Castlemilk and other parts of Glasgow. The effect of the change in the method of housing support grant calculation is relatively small. In Glasgow's case it will involve 13p a week on Glasgow's rents. I have told the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that I am willing to consider the points that it wishes to put on empty houses when making the housing support grant settlement for the year thereafter.

Three factors must be borne in mind this year in respect of final allocations and receipts. The first is rising receipts; the second is that spending per council house should be maintained; and the third is that there are 26,000 fewer council houses than there were last year. If our estimates of receipts are found to be incorrect—in previous years they have been found to be cautious and underestimates—and a supplementary allocation is made, we always take that into account and do our utmost to make sure that those authorities which, through no fault of their own, have a shortfall benefit.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have only one more minute left. If the hon. Lady wishes to see me, I shall be happy to meet her and listen to her representations.

The estimate for receipts in 1991-92 was £243 million. The actual amount received was £280 million. The outturn was very much higher than expected. I strongly believe that that will happen this year. Our position is strong and creditable. Since the Conservatives came to power, 240,000 houses have been built in Scotland, but I must make it——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted Business).*

The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 138.

Division No 51] **[11.56 pm**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom

Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Davis, and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 17th December, be approved.

Revenue Support Grant (Scotland)

12.7 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I beg to move,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1992, dated 16th January 1992, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.

The order has two purposes. First, it marks the final stage of the local government settlement for 1992-93, details of which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State first announced to the House last July, when he emphasised that the settlement included £50 million from other programmes within the Scottish Office because of high local authority current expenditure in Scotland. Secondly, it redetermines the amount of revenue support grant for each Scottish local authority for 1990-91 in the light of the actual level of non-domestic rate income for that year.

I deal first with 1992-93. My right hon. Friend announced to the House that the aggregate external finance for that year had been set at £5,130 million—6·1 per cent. more than the corresponding figure for 1991-92. The House will recognise that that figure is well above the rate of inflation.

The AEF figure has three components. The first is non-domestic rate income. On the basis of the rate poundages which my right hon. Friend announced on 23 December and which are prescribed in the Non-Domestic Rate (Scotland) Regulations 1992 which were laid before this House on 15 January, we estimate that the total level of NDRI in 1992-93 will be just under £1,263 million. The rate poundages for 1992-93 do, of course, take account of the reduction of £60 million which I announced on behalf of my right hon. Friend last November as the third stage of the Government's unified business rate policy.

The second component of AEF is the provision for specific grants which will be paid in 1992-93. That is estimated at just over £333 million. A breakdown of that figure is given in the report. I am glad that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is appreciative of the publicity which Stephen Hendry and I received for the new jobs in his constituency.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): The hon. Gentleman knows more about politics than the Minister.

Mr. Stewart: He certainly knows a lot more about snooker than I do.

The third component is revenue support grant. For 1992-93 this totals almost £3,534 million, including £7·5 million which will be provided to the authorities which since 1989-90 have benefited from the revenue support grant safety net. The main purpose of the order is to specify how this total amount of RSG is allocated among Scottish authorities. A full explanation of how AEF for 1992-93 has been distributed to authorities is contained in the report to the order.

I shall summarise the procedure. There are broadly two stages in the process. The first stage is to equalise differences in authorities' spending needs as determined by the client group assessment methodology. Just over £736 million of the total amount of RSG and NDRI—just over 15 per cent. of the total—is used to equalise spending needs. The second stage is straightforward. It is to distribute the rest of RSG and NDRI, excluding the safety netting amount to which I referred—that is, a sum of just under £4,790 million—on a straight per capita basis.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Minister explain why the Government are imposing the technical adjustment in the aggregate external finance in the way that it will affect the Highlands, the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway? It will mean that some district councils in those regions will have to pay more in impost and community charge—Roxburgh, for example, will have to pay £12 more. Is there no provision in the various stages for a phasing-in of that technical adjustment to ameliorate its effect on the coming year's community charge in those districts?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is right. There is a technical adjustment and the three regional councils—the Highlands, the Borders and Dumfries and Galloway—benefit from it. In the past, those three regions have provided services such as libraries and building control but that RSG went to the district councils. The hon. Gentleman makes the reasonable suggestion that the change, which no one disputes is correct, should be phased. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that if the regions and districts agreed and COSLA put a phasing proposal to him he would consider it positively. I do not especially blame or attack COSLA for it, but the problem was that its members were unable to reach an agreement.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks that there is a problem here, he should consult Borders regional council. It was one of the authorities which, for understandable reasons, could not reach an agreement. This is an important matter for the districts concerned, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there should be no additional community charge for the charge payer.

Mr. Kirkwood: We shall see.

Mr. Stewart: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman does not trust Borders regional council to pass on the money.

Mr. Kirkwood: I do not trust the Government to give Borders regional council the grant.

Mr. Stewart: The council has the grant. There is a straight transfer, which is agreed to be reasonable, between the regions and the districts. There is no reason why any individual community charge payer in any of the 16 districts should pay any more than he or she would otherwise pay. I shall share the outrage of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) if the saving made by Borders regional council is not transferred automatically to the community charge payer.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): If the council does not do that, will the hon. Gentleman shave his whiskers off?

Mr. Stewart: I shall not respond to any personal criticism coming from the general direction of the hon. and learned Gentleman.

I return to explaining the order in detail. The £7·5 million safety netting amount has been distributed to all authorities that have benefited from the safety net since its inception in 1989-90. They will each receive 50 per cent. of the amount that they are receiving in the current year. The

[Mr. Stewart]

main beneficiaries are, therefore, Strathclyde region and Glasgow. As the House knows from previous debates, 1992-93 will be the final year of the safety net.

Hon. Members representing constituencies in Lothian have made a claim—I do not criticise the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) for not being here, but I had intended to quote from his constituency newsletter—have claimed for some time that Lothian is somehow being cheated over the distribution of Government support. If I recall correctly, the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) made the same allegation in a recent Committee debate on the Local Government Finance Bill—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps he did not. If my memory is not accurate I shall not press the point.

Mr. Maxton: When people get to the Minister's age——

Mr. Stewart: This week the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley celebrated his 60th birthday, and people said to me that I look almost as old as he does.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I am not normally allowed to speak from the Dispatch Box in Scottish debates. The Minister has a digit wrong, yet again.

Mr. Stewart: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman who, this week, celebrated his 65th birthday.

The claim by hon. Members with Lothian constituencies is absolute nonsense. The allocation under the grant-aided assessment system is the result of the client group methodology which is agreed and which is regularly reviewed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. I hope that the hon. Member for Cathcart will not follow the view that Lothian has somehow been disadvantaged under the system that is agreed with COSLA. I am sure that if he were to take that view, his good friend, councillor Pat Lally, would immediately correct him.

Mr. Maxton: He normally does.

Mr. Stewart: Yes, he normally does.

As I said, the second purpose of the order is to redetermine revenue support grant for 1990-91. It may be helpful to the House for me to explain briefly the background to the redetermination. In view of the difficulty of estimating the amount of non-domestic rate income that an authority will receive in a particular year as a result of, for example, valuation appeals, agreement was reached last year with COSLA to guarantee the combined RSG and NDRI figure issued to each authority at the time of the original distribution proposals for the year in question. The year 1990-91 is the first to which the guarantee applied.

The agreement with COSLA was on the basis of swings and roundabouts. If an authority's actual level of non-domestic rate income for the year in question is above the original estimate, its RSG figure will be reduced. If NDRI is below the original estimate, its RSG will be increased. Local authorities have, I think, welcomed the arrangement as providing stability for their Government-determined support. I must tell the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) that Cunninghame benefits to the tune of £3·6 million as a result of the agreement and of the positive Government response to the reasonable representations that he and his hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) made—I know that he cannot be here this evening because he is on legitimate Council of Europe business—to the Government. The readjustment has been accepted by COSLA.

As I said, the settlement is well above the rate of inflation. It is fair and reasonable. I recommend the order to the House.

12.22 am

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I prefer the Minister when he is being slightly more rumbustious rather than drearying his way through the details of the revenue support grant. He was lucky because he managed to get the details before the end of last week. The rest of us could not because the Government appeared to be unable to lay the details before the House earlier than that. It is disgraceful that we are expected to discuss such orders with our local authorities and with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities when they are not laid before the House a week before the debate.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The hon. Gentleman will accept that the local authorities had the figures in essence on 11 November. I hope that he is not speaking for the entire Labour party in saying that it and the local authorities do not speak to each other over such a long period.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): That was not the final document.

Mr. Maxton: That is right. It was not the final document, as my hon. Friend makes clear. The simple fact is that we had not got the order. We should have had it long before it was laid.

I also found the Minister's speech remarkable for the fact that, having met Western Isles council today to discuss its specific problems, he did not refer to that matter, as one might have expected. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) will have the opportunity to make the case for the council.

On the surface, the Minister's claim that this year's revenue support grant settlement is generous seems reasonable—inflation stands at 4·3 per cent. and the increase in the settlement is just over 6 per cent. But the Minister blandly and deliberately avoided the real position facing local authorities in the coming financial year.

First, the assumptions made about the level of next year's pay increases in the local government sector are, in the view of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Scottish local authorities and myself, totally unrealistic. The inflation in local government costs has been consistently above that of the retail price index, largely because pay accounts for nearly two thirds of local government costs, and the rate of wage increases has been higher in the main than inflation. As a result, local authorities have a finance shortfall.

Secondly, local authorities have calculated that they require an extra £80 million a year simply to cater for the extra burdens which the Government have imposed upon them. The extra duties include the setting up of the system for the collection of the new council tax, the extension of community care, protecting the environment and the control of dogs. All those add to the sums which local

authorities have to spend over and above their existing statutory obligations. Little account has been taken of those extra duties in the revenue support grant.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the Government have refused to take any account of the crisis that the poll tax has brought to local authorities. When the poll tax was introduced in 1989-90, local authorities budgeted for a collection rate of 94 per cent. against the collection rate of 98 per cent. which they had achieved under the old rating system.

In Committee, Ministers believed that, in putting the rate as low as 94 per cent., local authorities were being pessimistic. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), who served with me in Committee, will remember that he and I, and our colleagues, consistently said that 94 per cent. was wildly optimistic. During the passage of the legislation, my hon. Friend and I predicted that 85 per cent. was more likely. Two years on, 12 per cent. of the 1989-90 poll tax is still uncollected; 20 per cent. of last year's poll tax is still outstanding. As a result, local authorities face a shortfall of £343 million in income for the first two years of the operation of the poll tax.

Eight months into this financial year, £447 million, or 57·6 per cent., still requires to be collected, and local authorities are undertaking the biggest debt collection exercise in history. Despite what Ministers say, local authorities are making every effort to collect the money, but the task is enormous and is almost beyond their ability. Much of the outstanding debt is owed by people who are very poor but who, because of the absurd rule that the Government insisted on laying down for a minimum 20 per cent. payment, have to try to find the money. By law, local authorities must try to collect that money, even though the Audit Commission has said that it costs two and a half times more to collect that 20 per cent. than is raised by it.

It was interesting to note in *The Guardian* this morning a suggestion that the Chancellor, in his Budget on 10 March, intends to abolish the 20 per cent. minimum payment from 1 April this year rather than wait for the introduction of the council tax on 1 April 1993. I gather that he will also increase VAT again to try further to reduce next year's poll tax figures. It would appear that, yet again, Scottish Office Ministers, including the Secretary of State, will be kicked in the teeth by their Cabinet colleagues—*[Interruption.]* The Chancellor of the Exchequer. Having stoutly defended the poll tax through thick and thin, Scottish Office Ministers had to surrender and accept a return to a property tax which they had viciously attacked for five years, or a return to a roof tax, having condemned the Labour party for trying to introduce it. They had to stand on their heads, they had to squirm and they had to twist, but somehow they managed to do it.

Having repeatedly said that the 20 per cent. rule would remain—the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), said it in the Committee when he was trying to quote recently—the Minister said that the 20 per cent. rule would remain as long as the poll tax was on the statute book. It again appears that the Government may have to eat their words and that the Chancellor will intervene. Of course, we have been demanding that very sensible move month after month, year after year. Let us hope that at least one member of the Cabinet has been listening—the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I hope that he finds his glasses, for which he was looking earlier, and will be able to read his Budget speech, when he will announce that very sensible amendment.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Given what my hon. Friend just said, how are the changes likely to help local authorities with collection? Some local authorities are well ahead with the new demands for the tax. Will the measure mean that, once again, they will have to shred them?

Mr. Maxton: That is exactly the point. The Government should have made an announcement at least seven or eight months ago. They should never have introduced the 20 per cent. minimum payment at all, but to do it as a cheap election ploy in the Budget 20 days before bills have to go out and be paid is entirely cynical and something that the Government should not indulge in.

The Government should not indulge in cheap political electioneering. They should have got rid of the 20 per cent. rule months ago. It would have made sense—it still makes sense—to do so. Local authorities will have an enormous burden placed upon them. The Government cannot walk away from their responsibility for the poll tax and try to put all the blame on local authorities. They introduced the absurd system. I notice Conservative Members who served on the Committee and vigorously voted for the measure. Every finance expert said that the system simply would not work. The Government have now been forced to admit that we were right—the system will not work.

Why should local authorities, Scottish poll tax payers and the users of local government services have to pay the price of Ministers' crass stupidity? The Government should not continue to hide behind the smokescreen that was usefully given to them by those who advocated the non-payment campaign. Over the past few months, Scottish nationalists have tried to claim that the end of the poll tax was the result of their non-payment campaign. When they realised that non-payment was creating a major crisis for local authorities, with 3 million outstanding warrants, and local authorities facing cuts in services and imposing more than 30 per cent. increases on their poll tax payers next year, it became obvious even to them that they were in trouble over the issue of non-payment.

Then Scottish nationalists tried to claim that the deliberate non-payment campaign had had little effect and that it was the 70-odd per cent. of non-payers who could not pay who were the problem, not them at all. They were so mixed up that I have at times heard hon. Members using both arguments in the same speech, claiming, on the one hand, great success for the poll tax campaign and, on the other, that it was not really anything to do with them.

The fact is that their campaign has allowed the Government to dodge their responsibilities by putting the blame on the deliberate non-payers. The poll tax was always a crazy, unworkable system that would inevitably collapse under the weight of its own absurdities. What Scottish National party members and supporters have done is increase the problems for local authorities by not paying their taxes; they have given the Government an excuse for evading their true responsibility; and, most immorally, they have left thousands of poor people who mistakenly followed them with a burden of debt that will be round their necks for years. Scottish National party members——

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is my hon. Friend aware that Inverclyde district council

[Mr. Thomas Graham]

recently declared that it would increase the poll tax by £60 and reckoned that roughly half that came about because of non-payment? Is he aware also that a recent university study showed that Inverclyde was one of the poorest places in Europe? The Minister did not consider that when it came to the poll tax.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*—

Mr. Maxton: I will allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene in a moment; I am quite happy to do so. The members of the SNP, including the hon. Gentleman, called off their non-payment campaign as soon as the Government announced that the poll tax would be withdrawn. They were not concerned about what would replace it; in fact, they went into the Lobbies, when the vote eventually took place on the council tax, against that very council tax over which they had withdrawn their non-payment of poll tax campaign. Meanwhile, they took out their cheque books, paid their debts and left many of their supporters in dire straits, seemingly without feeling the slightest pang of remorse for the problems that they had caused these poor people.

Mr. Salmond: I should have thought that that was a rather better action than that of the nine colleagues of the hon. Gentleman who abandoned their non-payment campaign before the Government announced the demise of the tax, or the three colleagues who continued their non-payment campaign after the Government had announced the demise of the tax, or indeed the hon. Gentleman himself who surrendered before the battle was even joined.

When it comes to confusion, does the hon. Gentleman recall arguing to the House on 17 October 1990 that the non-payment campaign was irrelevant to the crisis in local authority finance? I have the quotation here if the hon. Gentleman wants me to read it into the record. Can he please explain why, during the non-payment campaign, he thought that it was irrelevant but, after the non-payment was over, all of a sudden he thought that it was substantial?

Mr. Maxton: The hon. Gentleman tries to pretend that he is a clever man, but he has never understood my position on the non-payment campaign. I have always believed that there would be a large non-payment of the poll tax by those who could not afford to pay it. His campaign and that of his hon. Friends had been a dangerous diversion which has given the Government an excuse. That has always been my argument on non-payment. I do not think that their campaign had a major impact on local government finances, but it gave the Minister and his hon. Friends that excuse. I would argue strongly that, but for that excuse, the sheer absurdities of the poll tax would have brought about its end six months earlier, and would have brought about the resignation of the ex-Prime Minister six months earlier as well. They extended the poll tax by giving the Government the excuse that the problems and failures of the poll tax were due to deliberate non-payment.

It was always a farce. What is so immoral about the approach is that the SNP has left thousands and thousands of poor people in debt, without a single pang of remorse. The Scottish National party is a bunch, as it has proved in case after case, of political chancers who are interested only in cheap political games.

The revenue support grant order, despite its apparent generosity, will do nothing to help local authorities with the crisis caused by non-payment of the poll tax. Services will be cut and there will be redundancies. Poll taxes will increase well above inflation. Luckily, the election is not far away. The electors in Scotland will not forget the important part played by the Government and by the arm-chair martyrs in the SNP in the poll tax mess. After the election, we will have a Government who understand local government and who will be able to work with local government to solve the problems facing it. The sooner that election comes, the better.

12.39 am

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I have heard some political chancers in my time, but that effort from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) was the best. In our earlier debate on housing and also in this debate, the hon. Member for Cathcart, who has been so full of himself, did not tell us what he proposes to do were he to be in government in the summer.

The hon. Member for Cathcart began by saying that local authorities needed 20 per cent. more revenue support grant. Would he give them that? The hon. Gentleman thought that he had made a case for extensive expenditure by local authorities in housing and on the revenue side, but he gave us no hint of what Labour would do—perhaps in a few months' time. Pehaps he is so lacking in confidence that he is worried about having to make any promises.

The hon. Member for Cathcart was irresponsible to the House and to Scotland by his reluctance to tell us what he proposes to do. People who read our debates and those who read reports in the press and see them on television will draw their own conclusions: they will decide that, as ever, the Labour party would allow rip-roaring expenditure in local authorities, which would inevitably be followed by high inflation and high unemployment. The proposals—or lack of proposals—of the hon. Member for Cathcart contain the usual socialist cycle.

The hon. Member for Cathcart highlighted the difficulties of some local authorities in collecting the community charge. I offer praise now to my regional council—although I shall criticise it in a moment—for budgeting for the coming year on a 95·5 per cent. collection rate. It believes that it can achieve that rate without difficulty. That shows what can be achieved if local authorities are determined and have the right policies.

In this debate, we must highlight the steady annual increase in local government expenditure, which has been far above the rate of inflation. Unless that is taken into account, we will inevitably fall once more into an inflationary cycle.

In the four years from 1988-89 to 1991-92, inflation rose by 23·6 per cent. Dumfries and Galloway region increased its expenditure by 36 per cent. Annandale and Eskdale district increased it by 88 per cent.; Nithsdale increased it by 40 per cent.; Stewartry increased it by 77 per cent.; and Wigtown also increased it by 77 per cent.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The hon. Gentleman has just referred to a list of councils that have increased their expenditure from between 40 per cent. and

70 per cent. Why have none of them been capped by the Secretary of State for Scotland, when Tayside region, which increased its poll tax by 7·9 per cent., is being capped?

Sir Hector Monro: The hon. Gentleman cannot abide a second. He has no patience to wait for hon. Members to contribute to the debate. He spends half his time intervening, sometimes in the most unnecessary way. If he would only sit down and listen, he might be able to comment later.

Given the tremendous increases in expenditure of local authorities, one might be under the impression that they had not received a generous revenue support grant. Over the same period, however, there was a 70 per cent. increase in RSG in the region which I represent. Annandale and Eskdale received an increase of 146 per cent. In round figures, the increases for Nithsdale, Stewartry and Wigtown were 170 per cent., 216 per cent. and 211 per cent. respectively.

There has been a vast increase in local government expenditure—there are no cuts in its expenditure. The cuts that are headlined by the press and taken up by the media relate to the exorbitant budgets that are presented by socialist councillors, who say, "Because we cannot spend to the extent of our budget, we are suffering a cut." In fact, they are spending more year on year. Socialist councils' expenditure is not being cut. It is high time that the nation began to understand that it is only budgets that could never be contemplated by anyone with any common sense that are being cut.

This year, the Government are providing 89 per cent. of the expenditure——

Mr. Maxton: They are controlling 89 per cent. of the expenditure, not providing it.

Sir Hector Monro: It is coming from the taxpayer, which is the most important factor. The hon. Gentleman has raised a quibble that is on a par with that of the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion).

Local authorities are controlling, to use the nomenclature of the hon. Member for Cathcart, 11 per cent. of overall expenditure. Revenue support grant has increased on average by 6 per cent., yet the expenditure of the regional council of Dumfries and Galloway has increased by 8·3 per cent. There is no reason to take grant-related expenditure to the maximum when good housekeeping could maintain it at the level of inflation. It is because of expenditure beyond the rate of inflation that the community charge of the regional council in my constituency is increasing by £39, or 29·5 per cent.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) did not remain in his place for very long to listen to the debate, but he referred earlier to libraries and building controls. I should be surprised if the regional council had taken those factors into account when it increased the community charge so substantially. It has done so when interest rates and inflation have been reduced and the revenue support grant has been increased. That example of local authority expenditure is, sadly, reflected so frequently in Scotland. Those who are on low incomes and those who are struggling to run businesses or commercial enterprises generally should be supported by smaller increases in the community charge.

Everyone should be prepared to engage in some tight budgeting at times when the nation's economy is difficult. We know that economies are difficult also elsewhere in Europe and throughout the world. Local authorities have a duty to keep down the rate of inflation. Every item of expenditure must be controlled.

I am disappointed that proposed reductions in community charge have been thwarted by socialists, Liberal Democrats and the Scottish nationalists who vote for more expenditure irrespective of whether it is required.

Of course, as Members of Parliament, we want to give our local authorities all the help we can where there have been complications, such as the transfer problem that has been mentioned, or if they have particular problems and want to put particular emphasis on, for example, school building repairs. However, the message that should go out from the House tonight is that local authorities are spending too much money; they are not cutting back. Year on year on year, they are spending more and more.

The only way to achieve sensible spending is through the policy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to cap those councils that go a good deal too far. I hope that that will not be necessary. I hope that councils will realise that they have a duty to be responsible and to set budgets below grant-aided expenditure if they possibly can.

I support the order, and I hope that my words will have some impact on some local authorities in Scotland.

12.50 am

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The day that has just ended has been a sad one for the Western Isles. It is certainly the saddest day that I have known since I came to the House. Next week, the Western Isles council will have to make a truly calamitous choice between increasing the poll tax in the islands many fold or introducing steep cuts in its budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said that there had been a delegation from the Western Isles today. In fact, there were two. There was one from the Western Isles council and one from the trades council—the largest delegation that I have seen during my time in the House. We had a meeting with the Minister, but I regret that we left it empty handed. We did not get the support for which we had hoped.

Since last July, the islands have been reeling in the face of a financial crisis—£24 million would have been a major loss for any community, but especially so for one such as the Western Isles. It is not just a case of almost half of the revenue budget being lost, but of that happening against an economic background already at a very low ebb. Over the past two or three years, almost all the industries in the islands have suffered extremely bad times, and the economy is very low by national standards.

Gross domestic product per capita in the islands is half that of the country as a whole. Income per household is two thirds of the national average. That is the background against which that calamity has to be considered, and the background that has led to a unique outcry from every sector of the community and to the joint delegation today.

The local council, which has to deal with this appalling position, has appealed for aid. The trades council has mounted a unique campaign, not just on behalf of those in work—either with the council or in the private sector, which will also be affected—but on behalf of the whole community of the Western Isles, especially the most vulnerable who will be hit hardest by this crisis.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

All sorts of other groups have added their voices to the campaign. I have received representations from the local health council which refer to the ramifications the crisis will have, not just within the economy, but throughout society. Members of the local branch of the Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped have also raised their voices. They include relatives of people who will be hit by the crisis and are protective and concerned about those who are truly the most vulnerable in a community, and the innocents in the affair—the mentally handicapped.

Thousands of other individual voices have made representations to me directly. Every weekend when I go about the constituency and walk the streets I am told that the matter is of ever-pressing concern to people, and has been since last July. That worry was made manifest in the petition signed by thousands of people that was handed in to the Scottish Office.

The Government may say that the council has brought the crisis on itself through some form of financial management. However, it is not the council, as an entity, that will be directly affected, but the people of the Western Isles—the community. Those people did not participate at any level in the decisions that led to the present problem.

If the council is to blame for aspects of mismanagement, why should the resulting problems be visited on the people, particularly when the council, whatever errors it may have made, was not unique in doing so? Its members acted on advice that they received and, in the months to come, when the Bingham inquiry reports, the chain of errors will be shown to go much higher than the Western Isles council. It will be seen that the key mistakes were made by those responsible for regulating this country's financial system—the Bank of England and the Government.

Mr. Salmond: Many hon. Members will find it extraordinary that, as the poll tax is such a small percentage of the finance of the Western Isles council, that authority should be expected to bear the burden of such a gigantic loss. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in discussions that I have had with the Minister about my local authority, the Minister made the extraordinary statement that, even if the Bingham inquiry were to find the Bank of England or the Treasury culpable for what happened with the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, that would not necessarily affect local finance in Scotland? Given that the Government seem to be disowning any culpability of their own, how can they use the culpability argument as an excuse for not providing help for the Western Isles?

Mr. Macdonald: The Government's argument in that instance is untenable. The case of Barlow Clowes shows that, where a Government Department has been found to have fallen down on its job and that has resulted in people losing their savings, the moral responsibility lies with the Government, who should respond to the problem and pay compensation, which they did in that case. They will have to do so in the case of the Western Isles if the chain can be traced back to where I suspect it can.

It would be interesting to have before us the testimony and evidence that the Prime Minister and the other Ministers involved will present to the Bingham inquiry. I understand that some of it has already been submitted, but we shall not be able to have access for a number of months—probably, coincidentally, not until after the general election.

Perhaps the most perverse aspect of the whole affair is the fact that, when the truth finally comes to light and the real burden of blame can be assessed, those who are shown to be ultimately guilty and to have fallen down on their responsibilities and duties will no longer be there to clear up the mess, having been discharged from office by the people.

Let me illustrate the impact that the cuts would have. A number of secondary schools in my constituency would close—Leurbost, Scalpay, Leverburgh, Eriskay and Uig schools. All those schools serve small, remote communities, for whom a school is not simply a place of learning where youngsters can develop skills and talents and then move on, but a community centre. Not only education, but whole communities would be hit by the proposed cuts.

Community workshops would close, and the number of teaching posts would be reduced. Some 50 jobs in the Western Isles education department could be lost. Library and text book provision would also be reduced. Something that I find especially poignant, although it is not included in the list from which I am quoting, is the likely reduction in the already paltry provision of special education for children with learning disabilities. They cannot travel to another nearby town; they are stranded on the Western Isles. If the education that they need is not supplied by the council there, it will not be supplied at all. It is when considering such details that we truly appreciate the consequences of the proposed cuts for the islands' community.

Social services will suffer as well. There will be no grant for playgroups, daycare clubs and voluntary organisations; centres for the physically and mentally handicapped will also be hit. Innocent people will be caught up in an international banking scandal and crisis.

Lucky people will suffer too: people, that is, who are lucky in comparison with those who lack work and incomes. An estimated 300 job losses will result from the cuts in one of the three Scottish travel-to-work areas with the most unemployment. That estimate is based on the Fraser of Allander Institute's computer model, which was completed last year with Scottish Office help; in other words, it is based on an independent study. It will have an impact not just in one year; it will happen year after year, for 30 years. Almost £3 million a year is to be squeezed out of the community, for no productive purpose, for that period of time. About £90 million will be squeezed out of a community of 30,000 people. It is intolerable.

A Government with imagination and a constructive will could do something to help. They could do a number of things. A variety of capital programmes could be brought forward. Certain projects deserve support on their merits. For example, there is no direct Government funding for a trunk road network on the islands. Any funding that is made available has to go through the local authority. The Government could provide help for that. In the long term, it would save revenue. There would be a saving on repairs and maintenance.

Houses need to be built. Schools need to be refurbished. The economic infrastructure ought to be built up. Various European Community projects would be beneficial, if the Government were prepared to become involved in them. A leader project has already been awarded to the Western

Isles, in conjuction with Skye and Lochalsh. Bruce Millan recently announced a new programme specifically targeted at declining textile industries. That would be of great help to the Western Isles, by virtue of the Harris tweed industry. If all that is to happen, the Government have to show a positive will to assist.

Today we have asked for help on the revenue, the cash flow side. Again the Government, with a little imagination, could assist. For example, the revenue side of the council's budget contains a special islands element. The Government ought to look at that closely. I await an undertaking from them. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) referred earlier to lifting the burden of the police and fire brigade requisition which the Minister knows has increased this year and is totally outwith the council's control. The Government could, if they were willing, see whether it could be rearranged in such a way as to lift that additional burden from the shoulders of the islands community.

There is a rare mood of dismay and despair in the islands. I have not experienced that mood since I was a young boy in the 1950s and early 1960s. There was a mood of gloom in the islands then. That has lifted since the early 1970s. It was lifted by the very council that now faces so much criticism and mockery. It was a pioneering and imaginative council throughout those years. It made a tremendous difference to the islands community. It restored hope and optimism throughout the community. Even when things were not going too well economically, people still felt that things were improving. The tragedy is that their morale has been devastated by the impact of this loss. People are looking for a signal of help from this Government to give them hope and raise their morale. They want to be able to see some light at the end of the tunnel. We got a no today, but we shall be back month after month and year after year until we get assistance.

The Government will have to change their attitude. Otherwise, I fear that their failure to appreciate and sympathise with them and to help positively will not only affect the opinions of people in the Western Isles but have an impact on people throughout Scotland who are watching the situation. They, at the end of the day, will change the Government.

1.9 am

Mr. Nicol Stephen (Kincardine and Deeside): It has been said already that the 6 per cent. increase in grant is generous on the face of it, but that it is misleading. It is also misleading to suggest some spurious reasons why the grant should be more generous. For example, the funds that the Government have made available for the introduction of the new council tax legislation total more than the entire accumulated bids from all the local authorities. That proves that even the Government are prepared to throw money at problems, certainly when those problems are writ as large as the poll tax.

The amount of grant available is misleading in the sense that the total forecast increases that poll tax payers in Scotland will pay are nothing like 6 per cent. Taking even the Government's figures, it is likely that the increases will average about 10 per cent. On the basis of the figures provided by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we could well face an average increase of 25 per cent. At a time of serious economic recession, with unemployment increasing and major closures such as that at Ravenscraig, that will put a terrible additional tax burden on the people of Scotland. It should be prevented.

Let us take a moderate, well-managed council, such as Grampian regional council, which is likely to fix the lowest poll tax of any regional council in Scotland. Despite that, Grampian's personal community charge will rise by about 12·5 per cent. That is unacceptably large, with inflation at current levels. Why is that happening? It is certainly not because Grampian region is spending excessively on essential services. Grampian is spending about £5 million less than the Government say that it requires to spend to provide essential services. That is true of many other local authorities in Scotland. If Grampian spent up to the Government's limit, the increase in the poll tax would be roughly double what poll tax payers in the region face.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said that the Government's allowance for inflation and increases in wages was inadequate. That argument is put every year and, indeed, every year the Government underestimate. Apart from that, there are two closely related reasons why the 6 per cent. increase in grant will lead to such a big increase in the poll tax.

The first reason is the gearing effect. Aggregate external finance has been reduced this year—placing a huge additional burden on the poll tax payer—from 88·9 per cent. to 88·4 per cent. That sounds like only a small amount. However, when one looks at it the other way round, the poll tax payer has to fund 11·6 per cent. instead of 11·1 per cent. of expenditure. Immediately, the poll tax payer is hit by a 4·5 per cent. increase, before we have even begun to look at inflation and other factors. That, in a nutshell, is the gearing effect. It means that any small shift in Government grant puts a huge burden on the poll tax payer. That is because the poll tax created such a narrow tax base. That must be changed.

The second reason is closely related but is perhaps more interesting. Last year, the Government announced a £140 per head reduction in poll tax bills, to be funded by increases in value added tax. The £140 reduction is still included in the calculation of this year's figures, but not a penny more, not a penny less. In the past year, inflation has continued apace, eroding the value of that £140. To compensate the poll tax payer for that erosion, the figure would have to be increased to £146.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument, but if the Government were to accept his suggestion, the gearing effect which he has criticised would be worse.

Mr. Stephen: If the Government were to do what I suggest, the effects of gearing would be mitigated because additional funds would be made available through grant, which would reduce the impact on the poll tax payer. My party advocates radical overhaul of the system, which would remove the gearing effect, but as long as we have it the impact of small changes in the grant system are significant to the poll tax payer, as evidenced by the £140 payment.

VAT is a buoyant tax and Government income has increased as a result of the increase to 17·5 per cent., but there has been no extra benefit for the poll tax payer. I plead with the Government to make some extra cash available. They should meet local authorities' demands so that those authorities can plan ahead more thoroughly. If

[Mr. Stephen]

the Minister intends to abolish the 20 per cent. payment for people on low or no incomes, then do so tonight. If he wants to change the system, tell us now. Local authorities will prepare demand notices in late February and early March. If the Government delayed an announcement until the Budget on 10 March, it would be a blatant attempt to buy votes at the expense of hundreds of thousands of pounds being wasted on preparing and then destroying millions of poll tax demand notices.

That approach could delay the issuing of demand notices, the electoral advantage of which might not have escaped the Government. The Minister should prevent that delay, prevent a few trees from being destroyed and prevent justifiable accusations of cynical manipulation of the Scottish voters.

If the Government are to announce any reduction in the Scottish poll tax, whether it be in the £140 payment or the abolition of the 20 per cent. rule, they should announce it here and now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) mentioned the added difficulties faced by 16 district councils. The Scottish Office's late and rather inept transfer of grant from district councils to regional councils is causing severe difficulties. Sutherland district council is one of the worst affected. It faces a 76 per cent. increase in its poll tax. That is through no fault of its own and is largely as a result of the transfer of grant, again putting the burden on the poll tax payer.

Mr. Allan Stewart: If the hon. Gentleman listened to my reply to the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, he would recognise, first, that there is a genuine anomaly and, secondly, that there is no personal increase for the community charge payer because one council gets more and another council gets less.

Mr. Stephen: The Minister may not be aware, but the Highlands region has made it clear that it does not intend to reduce its poll tax to take into account the additional grant that it will receive. I have received representations on this matter and copies of correspondence from my hon. Friends the Members for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) and for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan).

The important point is that the Minister well knows that he could intervene to solve the problem. I ask him to give a reassurance that he will intervene if he discovers that regional councils are avoiding their responsibility to reduce the poll tax to compensate and balance out the increase from district councils. As the Minister said, the district and regional councils have failed to agree. He has not received clear advice from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, but it did not prevent him acting before if he wanted to do so. I urge him to act now to protect the poll tax payers who live in those district council areas.

The business taxation system in local authority areas is a related issue. There has been some equalisation. Businesses in Scotland used to be taxed an average of 60 per cent. more than those in England and Wales, but I understand that that figure is now down to 40 per cent. more. The Minister is making £60 million of additional funds available this year to allow for that equalisation—£11·5 million is supposed to come from local authorities through so-called efficiency savings. If local authorities continue to make the savings that the Government seek, I assure the Minister that the authorities will be very lean and efficient indeed. The remainder will come from central Government.

After the coming fiscal year, there are only two fiscal years in which to make the fiscal adjustment—£60 million this year means that £200 million will be required over the following two years. I ask the Minister to make a commitment that he still intends to achieve equalisation by 1995.

I finish by dealing with the Government's capping powers. The Government said that capping would not be required in respect of the poll tax, but the powers remain as draconian and as centralist as ever. Does the Minister intend to us the capping powers in the coming fiscal year? If the Government truly wished to avoid doing so, they could have introduced a fair voting system for local authorities, with elections based on proportional representation. They could also have introduced a local income tax to raise local government revenues, based on a system under which ability to pay is taken into account.

1.21 am

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): When we debated housing support grants, hon. Members expressed strong views about the appalling state of affairs and the impact on people's lives. It was a pity that we did not have more time for that debate.

This debate is about the level of services provided, which seriously affect people's lives in other ways. We are talking about the price of emptying bins and cleaning the streets, of providing libraries and swimming pools, cleaners for council buildings, school dinners, home helps, education and social services, water, sewerage, roads and much else besides. We know what impact massive cuts will have on such services and on people's lives.

It has already been said that, although a 6 per cent. increase might have been regarded as reasonable if everything else was equal, we know that everything else is not equal. Although such an increase is well above the rate of inflation, it in no way compensates local authorities for their financial position since the introduction of the poll tax. The Government know that there is no less than £334 million outstanding from the first two years of the poll tax.

In refusing to pay heed to the lack of that enormous amount of money, the Government are not facing their responsibilities. Jobs will be lost—that is what it comes down to. The Government will be morally responsible for the loss of £334 million-worth of jobs because they introduced the poll tax. They are refusing to give the councils any credit for their efforts to cope, and refusing to face widespread poverty, especially in areas such as Strathclyde, where the system of paying for local government is unjustifiable, unjust and unworkable. They have refused to acknowledge that the provision will be required to meet several other types of increase which, although more minor, are still important—for example, pay and price increases next year. Teachers alone have won a commitment to 9·2 per cent., and the education bill accounts for a large slice of the expenditure of any regional council. That alone will lead to an enormous increase, which the Government ignore.

There is also the cost of introducing the council tax, and the responsibilities for community care and other matters that have been mentioned by COSLA. They are all being

disregarded, too. If we add all those costs together, it is clear that the settlement is about 3 per cent. short of what local authorities will require.

The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) talked in terms of local authorities having to be controlled because they kept going in for vast expenditure and were all terribly unreasonable. But if he bothered to pay any attention to the estimates of local authorities anywhere in Scotland, he would see for himself that that idea is laughably far from the truth.

Councils such as Glasgow may introduce the odd improvement in service here and there, but those are more than offset by the cuts in services caused by the need to balance something like a decent level of service against the amount that the council has to call upon its poll tax payers to pay. Even when substantial cuts are made, the people of Glasgow still face an enormous increase in poll tax.

If there were such a human being as a Tory Member of Parliament for a Glasgow seat, such a person would have to sit on the Government Back Benches tonight looking very embarrassed.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): We shall never see it.

Mrs. Fyfe: No, we shall never see it—not in a million years. But if there were a Tory representing a Glasgow seat, that person would have to admit shamefacedly that what the Government say about councils such as Glasgow —and all the other Scottish local authorities—is absolute nonsense. Hon. Members can simply open the books and see for themselves that there is no such thing as those vast increases that Conservative Members parrot about, hoping that people will believe them.

Do people come to our surgeries on a Friday night and say, "Stop wasting our money—your services are far too good"? Do they hell. They want services improved, and a Labour Government will deliver that.

1.26 am

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I shall be brief, because I hope that there will be an opportunity for the Minister to reply—at least to the speech of the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald). We should try to get an undertaking from the Government this evening if we can.

We know that local government finance is in a mess, and the Scottish National party will not let the Government off the hook on that issue. We opposed the poll tax on clear and stringent grounds. We have always argued that the poorer sections of the community—those who pay 20 per cent.—should have the tax remitted. That should be done now, as a matter of urgency.

Figures have been quoted about the indebtedness of such people to the local authorities. I shall spend a minute trying to examine the convoluted reasoning of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton). He said that there would be only about an 86 per cent. pay-up, yet now he complains because his predictions have been fulfilled. He blames the Scottish National party and others for that. That is the reasoning that someone uses when he has been educated at a fee-paying school—*[Interruption.]* I ask hon. Members not to interrupt. I only have a few minutes left, and I want to be fair to the hon. Member for Cathcart.

At the beginning, the Labour Front-Bench spokesman argued that the non-payment campaign would have a marginal impact—*[Interruption.]* What a murmur. Then, when the hon. Member for Cathcart sees that people who really cannot pay compose the bulk of the non-payers, he argues about what people such as myself have done. We were frequently supported by members of the Labour party, such as the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who was a stringent non-payer. In those circumstances, the Labour party deserted the poorest section of the population and said to them, "Pay up, stump up and go cap in hand." That is on the Labour party's conscience and it will have to answer for that in areas such as Cathcart and Garscadden. I know from going round constituencies such as Dumfermline, West and Glasgow, Garscadden that no criticism is levelled at the Scottish National party. The criticism from the poorest section of the population is levelled at the Labour party.

The Labour party hopes to inherit office at the general election. If that happens, there will not be the current level of non-payment. Very few people will pay, and Labour has no answer to that problem. I hope that the Minister will reply to the points about Western Isles.

1.30 am

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) on his moving submission on behalf of his local authority and of the people he represents about the plight in which the Western Isles council now finds itself.

I address remarks to the Government and to the Government who will come to power in 12 weeks' time, when my Front-Bench colleagues will be Ministers. No Government, whether Conservative or Labour, are entitled to abandon a community because of mistakes made by others and not by the community. No Government are entitled to expect the community—in this case Western Isles council—to tell people that they must lose their jobs to pay the penalty that should be borne by others.

The Government have a social responsibility here. It would be easy for the Conservative party to write off Western Isles politically because it will not make any impact there. It would be easy, but immoral. The moral case is plain. As a mainland Member of Parliament, I plead the case of the community of Western Isles, because the suffering that those people will endure must be beyond our comprehension. They will suffer not only for the next few months, but for years ahead because of mistakes made by others. They should not be made to pay, and I plead with the Government to look on Western Isles as a special case.

It has always struck me as nonsense that we should discuss the revenue implications without discussing capital expenditure as well, and I refer especially to policing. We have seen a massive increase in crime in Scotland. I speak with some pride as a former Minister, because, when I left the post in which I was responsible for police and crime prevention in Scotland, there was a reduction of 13 per cent. in crime levels in Scotland.

We have now seen an explosion of crime in Scotland. The resources must be made available, either through revenue expenditure or through capital expenditure, to allow our police forces to deal with that explosion of

[Mr. Harry Ewing]

crime. If that does not happen, we shall pay the cost in terms of human life and of human misery for many years to come.

1.33 am

Mr. Allan Stewart: The House will recognise that there is a limited time left—I make no complaint about that—in which to reply to the debate. I may wish to write after the debate to the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) about his detailed points. I say to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) that I want to spend a few moments on the question of the Western Isles, as the House would expect.

I say to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) that, when I opened the debate, I set out the general position in relation to all local authorities. As he has told the House, I met two delegations today. I saw no point in being other than absolutely clear with the Western Isles council.

My right hon. Friend has agreed to extra borrowing consent of some £24 million to keep essential services going, but the Government must have regard to the position not only of other local authorities but of the large numbers of other depositors in BCCI. Of course, the Government are not in the position, which might have been possible, where COSLA came and said to us, "Here is a general formula which we are prepared to put forward." I am not criticising COSLA for that.

I must also point out that the personal community charge in Western Isles is £26. That compares with the Scottish average of £247. I fully recognise that the Western Isles council will have to face some very hard decisions. I say two things in response to the hon. Member for the Western Isles. I recognise what he said about capital and roads, and we will take that into account.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the island needs allowance, which was raised by the delegation this afternoon. We have this year helped Western Isles to the extent of £1·4 million through a change in that allowance, but I am prepared to make a commitment to an independent study of the island needs allowance, both in total and in its distribution among Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, because I think that the dissatisfaction of the Western Isles about the distribution has considerable merit.

Opposition Members have made a fairly ritual complaint about the level of the revenue support grant. I must correct the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who attacked the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) for having attended a fee-paying school. The hon. Member for Cathcart was a teacher at a fee-paying school; the person who attended the school was the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar).

What was important was that there was no commitment by the Labour party to increase the level of the order which I commend to the House.

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business).*

The House divided: Ayes 150, Noes 107.

Division No. 52] **[1.37 am**

AYES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas

Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fisher, Mark
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robert N. Wareing and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Revenue Support Grant (Scotland) Order 1992, dated 16th January 1992, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.

PETITION

Mifegyne

1.48 am

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I have a petition from 483 of my constituents against Mifegyne, which is known as RU486. The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition sheweth

That we, the undersigned, wish to note with regret that the abortion pill Mifegyne has been granted a product licence. We believe that drugs and medicines should be used only to save life. We deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn beings and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of Mifegyne and any other drugs which, like it, are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I am pleased to present this petition and I agree with it. I think that it represents the majority view in my constituency.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. James Murray

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

1.49 am

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I am grateful for this opportunity to debate the pernicious consequences of section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989. In view of the way in which my constituent, Mr. James Murray, has been ripped off by the Department of Social Security, I make absolutely no apology for keeping the Minister and one of her officials here to respond to this debate at this ungodly hour of the morning. Those responsible for administering that legislation cannot possibly sleep easily in their beds at night, so they might as well come and face the music in the House.

Exactly three years ago, in January 1989, the Social Security Bill, which included a new provision to enable the Department of Social Security to raid industrial injury compensation awards, was debated in detail in Standing Committee F. By a cruel irony, while that Committee was at work, James Murray fell through a defective scaffolding platform while carrying out engineering repair work on the coal preparation plant at Bilston Glen colliery, a colliery that has subsequently been closed by British Coal.

Mr. Murray was married and was 30 years old at the time. He had a young family of twins, then aged three, and a five-month-old baby. The family were buying their house, and Mr. Murray had good prospects as a skilled engineer with British Coal. However, while working on that pipework during the night of 30 January 1989, a scaffolding plank gave way under his feet and he fell 20 ft to the ground, suffering permanent damage to several vertebrae, his wrist and his knee, not to mention cracked ribs and associated pain and trauma. That accident has obviously been a disaster for Mr. Murray and his wife and children. I want to challenge the Minister on the way in which the Department's compensation recovery unit has kicked Mr. Murray and his family when they were down.

Mr. Murray had a series of major operations to stabilise his spine, wrist and knee. He may well require painkillers for the rest of his life. He will certainly never be able to undertake physical work again. His engineering days are definitely over.

The family then had to give up the house because they could no longer afford the mortgage repayments. It was fortunate that East Lothian district council could let them another house as a matter of urgency.

For the first six months after the accident, the Murrays had to make do with benefits totalling just £70 a week. They later got advice which secured a range of extra benefits—industrial injuries disablement benefit, reduced earnings allowance, income support, invalidity benefit, mobility allowance and statutory sick pay. And why not? Mr. Murray had paid his national insurance contributions and his taxes for 14 years—ever since he started work at 16. He was fully entitled to those benefits.

Meanwhile, Mr. Murray, supported by his trade union, pursued a claim for industrial injury compensation against his employer, British Coal. The case came to court in November 1990. In fact, it was settled out of court, as virtually all such cases tend to be, on the advice of lawyers.

The agreed settlement was the payment of a capital sum of £50,000 to cover all aspects of the employer's liability for the tragic consequences of that defective scaffolding platform—the pain, suffering, loss of amenity, loss of employment prospects, loss of earnings and everything else. That was not, I suggest, a very generous settlement in the circumstances, but there it was.

By any reasonable analysis, such a compensation award should be seen as a capital sum to help a victim and his family to cope with an injury and to make the best of the rest of his life. It surely is not a total substitute for social security entitlements covered by the same victim's tax and national insurance contributions. But no: it then emerged that the Minister's compensation recovery unit had tallied up literally every penny of benefit that Mr. Murray and his family had received in the 20-odd months after the accident. That amounted to £17,705·98 to be precise, covering industrial injuries disablement benefit, reduced earnings allowance, income support, invalidity benefit, mobility allowance and statutory sick pay. One hundred per cent. of that £17,705·98 was then deducted from his £50,000 settlement, swallowing up 35 per cent. of his compensation, leaving him with a net capital award of £32,294·02 to compensate him and his family for all those serious and permanent injuries.

I cannot resist referring to the fact that this very week Mr. Jason Connery has been awarded £35,000 following a press story that claimed that he was scared of the prospect of conscription during the Gulf war. The alleged hurt feelings of an actor appear to be worth more than the permanent physical injury and pain of someone such as James Murray.

The legislation that provides for the clawback of benefits from industrial accident victims is as perverse as it is pernicious. I appreciate that under the 1948 legislation a compensator could offset a proportion of certain benefits against the award and that there were complications and anomalies, but the Government made things infinitely worse when they enacted what became section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989. The section is entitled

"Recovery of sums equivalent to benefit from compensation payments in respect of accidents, injuries and diseases."

The *Hansard* report of debates on what is now section 22 makes depressing reading. The Government, who have given such generous tax breaks to the very rich, are, as ever, taking meticulous steps to tighten the screw on less fortunate citizens, including even those who have suffered serious injury at work.

Section 22, which was clause 18 of what was the Social Security Bill, was vigorously opposed by the Labour Opposition in Committee and on the Floor of the House. The debate in Committee filled no fewer than 107 columns of *Hansard.* Labour Members, who were led by my hon. Friends the Members for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), tried again and again to restrict the scope for clawing back a victim's compensation. The Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott), was having none of it. He tried to justify the Government's mean measure by saying that to combine benefit entitlement with other compensation would be to pay a victim twice for the same thing. He even tried to claim support by quoting the Beveridge report of 1942, which was the foundation of the national insurance scheme. The right hon. Gentleman quoted paragraph 260 of the report, which states:

"An injured person should not have the same need met twice over. He should get benefit at once without prejudice to any alternative remedy, but if the alternative remedy proves in fact to be available, he should not in the end get more from two sources together than he would have got from one alone."

I understand that principle and I do not necessarily dissent from its fair application, but I submit that we have another and worse form of double jeopardy, where the victim and his employer are both paying for the state benefits through tax and national insurance and the employer is also paying for the compensation, probably through an employer's liability insurance premium. At the same time the Department of Social Security is having its cake and eating it by accepting national insurance contributions and clawing back benefit from compensation claimants, as in Mr. Murray's case.

The other serious flaw in the Government's case for filching compensation from people such as Mr. Murray is the fact that on one hand not all of the compensation relates to claims covered by benefits while on the other not all of the benefits are reflected by any part of the compensation award. For example, compensation awards cover such considerations as pain, suffering, loss of amenity and loss of employment prospects. Not everything is earmarked, especially in out-of-court settlements, but it is clear that the bulk of the award has nothing to do with considerations covered by social security benefits. It is rank nonsense to talk of double compensation in that context.

Equally, a benefit such as mobility allowance, which is also subject to the clawback, has nothing to do with loss of income, injury at work or even being out of work. It is supposed to be a free-standing benefit for those with mobility problems. Indeed, Mr. Murray is still receiving mobility allowance, and he is likely to continue to do so. It is because of the wretched section 22 of the 1989 Act that he has had, in effect, to pay back £2,191·40 of his mobility allowance in respect of payments received between his original claim and the court settlement in October 1990.

This is daylight robbery on the part of the Department. It gives new significance to delays in processing compensation claims in court. In Mr. Murray's case, the process took 20 months to complete, and all the benefit paid during that period was clawed back. Thereafter, of course, the benefit could continue without the threat of clawback. That illustrates the idiocy of the nasty provision that has been put in force by the Government. The delay cost almost £18,000, which is bad enough, but it is not impossible that, in similar circumstances, a complicated case could drag on for up to the maximum five years prescribed in section 22. If that were to happen, it would be possible for the total compensation payment to be swallowed up by the 100 per cent. DSS clawback. I do not know whether that has happened yet, but it could happen and the Minister should recognise that.

The clawback mechanism is spectacularly inconsistent because no similar provision applies to other forms of compensation, such as criminal injuries compensation. Why not? If the Government want to apply that sort of rule, why not apply it across the board? I would prefer that they did not, but at least they would be consistent.

I understand that, by a bizarre twist of the regulations, the clawback can be offset where a reward is reduced to take account of contributory negligence by the victim. Mr. Murray was in no way responsible for any part of his accident, so he could not take advantage of that. He did exercise his right to appeal against the clawback of his mobility allowance, on the undeniable grounds that mobility allowance should be completely detached from other considerations and that it is supposed to be isolated and protected from this sort of erosion. His appeal was rejected on the grounds of section 22 and the associated regulations.

Ministers have been warned about the dangers inherent in this fundamentally unjust legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South said in Committee:

"As I see it, the Government are setting a time bomb for themselves, because it can only be a matter of time before a judgment is made, under the combination of the existing damages system and clause 18, in which someone who, in the judgment of ordinary people, should receive damages, perhaps even substantial damages, yet will have those damages severely cut and perhaps almost wiped out by the prior claims of the Department."

Little did my hon. Friend know that at the very time that she was speaking that time bomb had been set in motion only four weeks earlier when Mr. Murray had his tragic accident. As my hon. Friend was speaking, Mr. Murray was already in hospital. The legislation has slashed his well-deserved compensation by 35 per cent. Any reasonable person would recognise that this is a monstrous injustice.

The Minister responded to my hon. Friend:

"I stand by the principles underlying the clause. My hon. Friends should have no reservations about voting for the clause and having their names associated with those principles."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F;* c. 857-910.]

Of course, Tory Members did vote for the clause and their names are certainly associated with it, to their eternal shame. We live in hope that the injustice may yet be remedied either by this House or elsewhere.

James Murray is not alone in his predicament. I understand that the Minister's compensation recovery unit and its staff of 136 civil servants has extracted more than £17 million from unfortunate people like Mr. Murray since the legislation was brought into effect retrospectively from January 1989. I suggest that people who have suffered that injustice should contact each other to co-ordinate pressure in Parliament and on the Government to get the legislation changed. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) has been active in pursuing this issue on behalf of a number of people from the mining industry.

It has become a bit of a cliche to talk about adding insult to injury, but that is precisely what the Government are doing to people like James Murray. He has been cruelly physically injured and he and his family have suffered as a consequence. Now, the DSS is adding to that injury by using downright insolent statutory powers to dock the compensation that he has secured.

However, we live in hope that sinners may repent. The Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), sent me a letter on 23 July last year which concluded:

"However, in common with other aspects of the new arrangements the Department is keeping the situation under review."

I hope so. I have got nowhere in my correspondence with Departments on behalf of Mr. Murray. His appeal in writing direct to the Prime Minister led only to a rather complacent reply from one of his officials.

This injustice cannot be allowed to stand or to continue. The incoming Labour Government will have to review the position, but principles of justice really should be above politics. That is why I make this final further appeal to the Minister to recognise that, under the circumstances, the 100 per cent. clawback of all those benefits is irrational, unjustifiable and demonstrably

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

unfair. It may be 2.4 am but it is still not too late for the Minister to put things right for Mr. Murray and the other victims of industrial injuries.

2.5 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on obtaining the Adjournment debate. The issues that he raised give me the opportunity to explain what actually happened in the case of his constituent, Mr. Murray. They also enable me to remind the House why the compensation recovery scheme was introduced, and to outline how it works.

I shall deal first with the background to the scheme. The principle of recovering the value of social security benefits from personal injury compensation awards is not new. The hon. Gentleman quoted the relevant paragraph from the Beveridge report on which we have always based our belief that double provision should not be made from public funds. That principle is the basis of our policy today, and is implemented by section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989.

The Act addressed inconsistencies in the operation of the general principle which had developed since it was first reflected in legislation in the Law Reform (Personal Injuries) Act 1948. Under that Act, compensators—the negligent parties—could reduce compensation by an amount equal to half the benefits specifically covered by the Act—for example, sickness benefit, invalidity benefit and disablement benefit. However, the deduction had to be applied to five years' benefit following the date of the accident, no matter how quickly compensation was settled. That meant that future benefit entitlement often had to be estimated. Clawback was based not merely on what had been paid and was readily verifiable but on what could be paid in the future. The hon. Gentleman may be mistaken therefore when he says that his constituent's benefit was slashed because of the new Act. In fact, under the new Act, because of the time in which the compensation was settled, his constituent may well have been better off. We estimate that 80 per cent. of people affected are no worse off than they would have been under the old Act, and those whose compensation is settled more quickly, and so not subject to clawback based on the future, are better off.

Many benefits, however, were not covered by the 1948 legislation—for example, income support, statutory sick pay, unemployment benefit, mobility allowance and attendance allowance. In the course of awarding damages for injuries, the court therefore considered the question of adjusting the award to reflect the amount of those benefits received from the state. In those cases, courts reduced the compensation by the whole of the benefit so that the injured person was not compensated from two sources. In some cases, the judgment was that no future benefit should be taken into account; in others, that more than five years' entitlement should be deducted. Moreover, and regardless of whether the reduction was made under the 1948 legislation or under later case law, the compensator was permitted to keep the amount deducted. That meant that he did not pay out the full amount for which he was liable. The cost instead fell as an extra burden on the national insurance fund and on the taxpayer.

The hon. Gentleman said that, as both employer and employee contribute to the national insurance fund, he did not see why there should be any clawback. Contributions to the national insurance fund is not done on the basis of covering negligence, which can be arranged through employer's liability insurance, but goes towards other benefits that Mr. Murray and others would expect to enjoy, such as the retirement pension and benefits that are paid for on the basis of national insurance contributions.

The policy was not dreamed up by a hard-hearted Department of Social Security, as the hon. Gentleman would have us believe. In 1987, a report to Parliament by the Comptroller and Auditor General examined the history of personal injury compensation and the overlap between social security benefits and damages. The Public Accounts Committee considered the report, and concluded that a compensation recovery scheme should be established without delay. The Government agreed to that.

As I said, the scheme was enacted in section 22 of the Social Security Act 1989. It came into operation in September 1990, and applies to compensation awarded after that date for injuries sustained on or after 1 January 1989.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister is trying to pass responsibility on to other advisory bodies. Did the PAC report, and the other reports to which she referred, specifically state that 100 per cent. of all benefits, including mobility allowance, should be clawed back in such circumstances?

Miss Widdecombe: There is no question of passing on responsibility. What I am saying is that there was general recognition that the law as it stood was deficient and should be remedied, and that that was what the Act attempted to address.

Mr. Home Robertson: It made matters worse.

Miss Widdecombe: I dispute that; five years' projected benefits are not now clawed back.

Let me now turn to the case of Mr. James Murray. The unfortunate injuries that Mr. Murray sustained at work on 30 January 1989 led him to claim various social security benefits: industrial injuries disablement benefit, reduced earnings allowance, income support, statutory sick pay, invalidity benefit and mobility allowance. He also claimed compensation from British Coal. Settlement of the size of the compensation award was reached in November 1990, and British Coal deducted over £17,000. That was the figure prescribed on the certificate of total benefit issued by the compensation recovery unit.

I should perhaps say in passing that the hon. Gentleman was wrong to suggest that, if criminal injuries compensation had been involved rather than employer's liability compensation, no deductions would have been made, because criminal injuries legislation itself prescribes that deductions in respect of benefit may be made. It should be understood that Mr. Murray would not have been better off if he had been mugged or run down in a car accident, as he has recently claimed in the local press.

Let me emphasise that there is no further claim under the Act against the award in respect of future payments. Invalidity benefit, mobility allowance and disablement benefit continued to be paid to Mr. Murray beyond November 1990. Had the old arrangements still been in

place, the compensators could have made deductions on the basis of benefits that Mr. Murray might have received for five years from the date of his accident.

When the compensation recovery scheme was designed, the Government recognised that in some instances victims, compensators or their representatives might disagree with the sum quoted on the certificate of total benefit—or, indeed, might wish to challenge the claim that all the benefits had been paid as a direct result of the accident involved. We therefore ensured that the legislation contained a right first to ask the compensation recovery unit to review its decision, and then to appeal to an independent tribunal.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Mr. Murray exercised his right of appeal. The basis of his submission to the tribunal was that mobility allowance should not have been included in the certificate of total benefit. He argued that the benefit had nothing to do with loss of income or injury at work, or even with being out of work. The appeal was considered by a tribunal in September 1990, and the chairman and members decided unaminously that, because mobility allowance is defined as a relevant benefit in the regulations, the decision of the compensation recovery unit should be upheld.

I should explain to the hon. Gentleman that mobility allowance was included as a relevant benefit because the Government took the view that, if the benefit was awarded as a consequence of the claimant's injuries, it should be recouped. Had there been no injury and no accident, the benefit would not have been paid; but it was the accident that led to the payment, and the benefit is therefore relevant. We believe that to be in line both with Sir William Beveridge's principle and with the previous case law stating that attendance and mobility allowances should be deducted in full, as they were to be regarded as available to meet the cost of care resulting from the accident generally.

I have every sympathy with Mr. Murray and his family, and I am saddened by the effects that the injury has had on them. Despite the sad cause, I am glad that the benefit system was able to give him immediate practical help without waiting for the outcome of his claim against his employer. However, I am unable to agree with the hon. Gentleman when he suggests that the legislation should not be permitted to impact in the way that it does. Parliament has accepted that the principles set out by Beveridge 50 years ago should be applied. This means that an injured person should not be compensated twice. I believe that in applying this principle the compensation recovery scheme represents a considerable practical improvement over the old and inconsistent arrangements.

I thank the hon. Gentleman again for raising this case and for giving me the opportunity to explain the position. He said that he got no joy whatsoever from his representations to the Department. Parts of his speech revealed some misunderstanding—other parts of it were based on plain disagreement—of the way that the law works. If he so wishes, I invite the hon. Gentleman to meet me to discuss the principles that underlie the rules and their application. I should have been very willing to do that at any time in the course of his representations to the Department.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes past Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*

Order for Third Reading read.

To be read the Third time on Thursday 30 January.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Tuesday 28 January at Seven o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime

1. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of crimes committed in 1991.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): A total of 5·1 million notifiable offences were recorded by the police in the 12 months to the end of September 1991, the latest period for which firm figures are available.

Mr. Hardy: Does not that answer confirm that the increase in crime in the past 12 years has been greater both in proportion and in number than the increase in crime over the previous 12 centuries? Will not the millions of victims of crime feel that the 1979 Conservative law and order policies are humbug? Do not the upholders of law have daily experience of the fact that the greedy society so desired by Conservative Members must inevitably be a bad one?

Mr. Patten: The Home Office research and statistics department is excellent and produces very good figures, but unfortunately we do not have on record the figures for 12 centuries ago. However, I advise the hon. Gentleman that crime has increased throughout the western world during the past half century. The hon. Gentleman should first reflect on the fact that, in his own area of South Yorkshire, the figures to which I have referred show that the incidence of sexual and violent crimes has been going down, not up. He should further refer to and reflect upon the continuous Labour search for excuses for crime rather than for the introduction of any sensible policies to deal with crime. In the end, it is down to a person's individual choice whether to be bad and to commit crime. That cannot be blamed on social factors.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Would my right hon. Friend care to estimate what percentage of those interesting crime figures are the result of members of the Labour party asking people to break the law?

Mr. Patten: I referred earlier to the excellence of the Home Office research and statistics department when I explained that we do not keep crime figures for the past 12 centuries. My hon. Friend has raised an interesting thought; perhaps I should ask the Department to look into it.

Mr. Hattersley: Why has crime in this country risen by an average of 6 per cent. per year since the war, but by 18 per cent.—three times the usual average—in the past two years?

Mr. Patten: Being assaulted by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on such issues is rather like being attacked by a bread and butter pudding. It looks very substantial on the surface, but when one looks below the surface, one finds nothing of any substance. The right hon. Gentleman's question contains its own answer. If the right hon. Gentleman would only himself address the causes of crime, he would realise that they would certainly not be solved by the suggestion made at the Labour party press conference this morning—that we should empty our prisons to pay for more police. That is what was said by the Labour party which in 1979 left the police forces of this country 8,000 under strength.

Mr. Graham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not take a point of order. However, as we shall have to live with each other for the next few months in an electioneering atmosphere, I refer hon. Members to "Erskine May" on moderation in language.

Public Order Act 1986

3. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to meet the chief constable of Essex to discuss proper implementation of section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 in the Thurrock parliamentary constituency.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): No, Sir. My right hon. Friend has no such plans. The implementation of section 39 is an operational matter for the chief constable.

Mr. Janman: Is my hon. Friend aware of the ever-increasing frustration and anger among hundreds of my constituents in Grays, Tilbury and South Ockendon, who almost on a weekly basis have to put up with large invasions of mobile itinerants on land near where they live? At the very best, the itinerants create a great deal of filth and rubbish, which the landowner or the council has to clear up. At the worst, they have an unfortunate impact on the local crime figures. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is a disgrace that chief constables across the country have declared a policy of not invoking section 39 if a civil remedy is available to the landowner? Does he agree that the law should be changed so that the police have a duty rather than just a power to act under section 39?

Mr. Lloyd: I am aware that a great many people suffer a great many problems because travellers, illegal

trespassers and wandering folk settle on land. Section 39, however, is specifically designed to deal with aggravated trespass. It is not designed to undermine the Caravan Sites Act 1968, which requires local authorities to provide official gipsy sites for those who normally resort to the area. If a local authority does what it is supposed to do under those Acts, it has access to the criminal law to deal speedily and effectively with those who settle unlawfully on land.

Mr. Sayeed: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but does he understand that there is a particular problem with certain councils, such as Avon county council? In the 23 years that that council has been in existence, it has not complied with the 1968 Act. As a consequence, section 39 is useless because the council will not move people off its land. Therefore, it is essential that people who live around the land, and are thus directly affected, should be protected under section 39 so that they can use the law to move people on.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend makes the point: it is his local authority's duty to comply with the 1968 Act and not for the chief constable to bend section 39 of the 1986 Act.

Sunday Trading

4. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the operation of the Sunday trading laws.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): It remains uncertain whether the Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act 1950 continue to form part of our law. But as my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General explained in answer to a private notice question from my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) on 27 November 1991, those provisions are not therefore suspended. Parliament has placed the primary responsibility for their enforcement on local authorities and it is for them to decide their own course of action.

For our part, we intend to bring forward proposals for reform of the Sunday trading law once the legal position is clear.

Mr. Alton: Does the Minister recall telling the House that the four criteria for the reform of Sunday trading were that it should be practicable, enforceable, and acceptable to the country and that it should command the support of the House? Yesterday the ten-minute Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) was overwhelmingly given its First Reading with a majority of 200, with all-party support. Does not the Minister think that it is time to ensure that that Bill is put on the statute book to safeguard what Churchill once described as the greatest of British institutions?

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand the anxiety of the House about the state of Sunday trading. I read the ten-minute Bill yesterday. I apologise for not being on the Front Bench for the debate. The result was interesting and certainly one which I shall study carefully. However, it would be foolish to introduce legislation before we know the outcome of the European Court of Justice declaration.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the Government's position puts all the responsibility as to whether to prosecute on local authorities? Many authorities find that enormously expensive. Are the Government prepared to put up money to assist local authorities if they decide to prosecute in the interests of what they believe ought to be the law, and in fact is the law?

Mrs. Rumbold: It has never been the case that central Government would indemnify local authorities for expenditure when they are already given money through the revenue support grant to enable them to undertake their responsibilities, and that is not a way forward. Nevertheless, local authorities may enforce the law as it stands.

Mr. Loyden: Is not the Minister passing the buck? There is widespread concern and strong opinion throughout the country that the Government are handling this issue most inappropriately. When will the Government take decisive action and end the hell of a mess in that section of industry?

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand the hon. Gentleman's frustration, but it is not so easy as Opposition Members keep asserting. If legislation were introduced at this point it is possible that it would fall foul of the decision by the European Court of Justice and thus be impracticable and a waste of public funds.

Mr. Harris: While accepting that the tremendous European complication about this cannot just be wished away, will my right hon. Friend take note of yesterday's vote and appreciate that a significant number of Conservative Members voted for that Bill. A factor for some of us in so doing was the fact that we have been saddened and sickened at the supermarkets' attitudes in exploiting the European difficulty. When studying possible reforms and changes in the law, will she consider that the decision to open on Sunday is taken not by local supermarket managers but nationally by their boards, and that if there is any change in the law they should be the ones to be prosecuted?

Mrs. Rumbold: The Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), was on the Front Bench yesterday and has reported to me the content of the ten-minute Bill and the vote. I fully understand the considerable cross-party support for what was said in the ten-minute Bill, but it is important that we wait a few months to see where the European Court comes down. It will not take long and the Government will then be able to take all those factors into account. One would hope that major retailers will be clear in their minds about their activities and the consequences that may accrue.

Mr. Randall: How many of the major companies that broke the law at Christmas and were not prosecuted are contributors to Conservative party funds?

Mrs. Rumbold: The last time I debated Sunday trading with the hon. Gentleman, he made the perfectly ludicrous suggestion that his party would have a conference on the matter—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer!"] It does not seem to me that there is any need for me to answer his silly question on the subject.

Murder (Provocation)

5. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the law relating to provocation as it affects cases of murder.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us not have a debate across the Chamber below the Gangway.

Mr. Baker: I am aware of concerns that have been expressed about this aspect of the law. The defences to murder have been reviewed on several occasions, most recently in 1989 by the House of Lords Select Committee on Murder and Life Imprisonment. There has been no recommendation to change the rule that provocation applies only where the defendant acts with a sudden and temporary loss of self-control. Any change must not make it easier for a defendant to escape conviction for murder in cases where there is a planned or revenge killing.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend for his interest in the subject. Is he aware that among women serving life sentences in Bullwood Hall women's prison for murdering their husbands there are several whose lack of command of English meant that they were not aware that there was anywhere that they could run to, that some women who had tried to run away from extreme brutality were dragged back by their families, and that some were terrified of leaving their children with a brutal partner, and that therefore they had to wait until they could do something about it and were driven to commit murder? Technically, they did not qualify for the defence of provocation, but their cases are heart-rending and should evoke a change in attitude towards the type of defence that women in those circumstances can claim.

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend has been to see me about this matter with a group of colleagues. I am sure that she will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual cases, particularly those among the ones that she has mentioned that might come before me.

I understand the concern that has been expressed in the House and in the country about this. However, I cannot condone, as a response to violence, the killing of the person who does that violence. There is concern about the law in this area and I believe that the arguments on it are finely balanced. Before we rush into changes to the homicide law, we must ensure that such changes do not do more harm than good. I assure the House that I shall keep this matter under the most careful review.

Mr. Ashley: I welcome the fact that the Home Secretary received a deputation and undertook to consider taking on my Bill. I accept that the right hon. Gentleman could not go any further at that time, but is he aware that his argument that a change in the defence of provocation might allow for revenge killings is wrong and invalid because juries would not accept it in the case of revenge killings? Will he bear it in mind that the law as it stands does great injustice and that many women are suffering life sentences that they should not be suffering? Will the Home Secretary think again, please?

Mr. Baker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the way in which he presented his case to me, although I hope that he did not take away from our meeting any belief that I was totally persuaded by the argument that he put forward. The House of Lords Select Committee looked into this matter just two years ago. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will recall that the Committee recommended that the defences of provocation and diminished responsibility and the offence of infanticide should be retained.

This is an important matter, particularly as it affects violence, and violence more perpetrated on the woman than on the man. One must not open up the possibility for either partner in a marriage or a relationship to murder their partner, not as a result of a sudden, temporary loss of control, but as a result of a careful, well thought out and premeditated plan. That is why the balance of the argument in this matter is so fine.

Europol

6. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet his European Community counterparts to discuss further progress in the Europol proposals.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Outline proposals for the establishment of Europol were approved at the meeting of the European Council in Maastricht in December 1991. Those proposals are now being developed and the United Kingdom has been in the forefront of police co-operation in Europe to combat the growing evil of international crime. Officials from all member states will be meeting regularly to develop the proposals and I shall be meeting my counterparts in June to review progress.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my right hon. Friend for that encouraging response and for the work that he and his colleagues are doing on this. Does my right hon. Friend accept that to some extent there is a link between ever closer co-operation among police forces and Community arrangements with Interpol? The public should be spared some of the more bureaucratic checks and delays at ports and airports that will occur, for example, at Dover and elsewhere, when there are too many uniformed officials stopping people unnecessarily. There is a certain linkage, although there are many difficulties. As we are only a year away from the start of the single market, will my right hon. Friend reassure the public that unnecessary bureaucratic delays will not occur at our ports and airports, to the annoyance of the public?

Mr. Baker: That goes rather wide of the question. I should make it absolutely clear that from 1 January 1993 we shall continue to maintain our frontier controls, particularly on matters of international crime, drugs and immigration. One does not want to occasion unnecessary delay in exercising those controls, but they must be sufficiently firm and rigorous to ensure that criminals who try to get into the country are detected and that illegal immigrants are similarly detected and prevented from entering the country.

Mr. Enright: Is the Home Secretary aware that there is considerable concern that the sort of co-operation that exists regarding the police is not subject to proper democratic scrutiny? Will he ensure that all discussions that take place are opened up for us to criticise and assist?

Mr. Baker: As far as the police are concerned, I and my fellow Ministers are answerable to the House. There is a

good co-operation between the British police and police forces on the continent because more and more crime—particularly drugs crime—crosses frontiers. A vast amount of drugs are coming into Europe from north Africa, from central Asia through the Balkans, and from South America. It is important that we work closely with our European partners on this. For example, we have 30 drugs liaison officers—British police and Customs officers—in more than 19 countries. The key factor is the exchange of information to deal with international crime.

Traffic Wardens

7. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what encouragement he is giving police forces to recruit and use traffic wardens for traffic control duties, particularly to meet seasonal needs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The recruitment of traffic wardens is the responsibility of individual police authorities and their deployment is an operational matter for individual chief officers.

Mr. Rathbone: I thank my hon. Friend for that information. Can he give some information about the way in which the Government can encourage the greater recruitment of traffic wardens up to full complement in police forces and encourage the better use of those wardens so that they make the best possible contribution to the maintenance of traffic flow and the release of police officers for the control of crime?

Mr. Lloyd: The Home Office funds 51 per cent. of traffic warden service costs through the police grant. As my hon. Friend no doubt knows, under the Road Traffic Act 1991, local authorities will be able to seek power to recruit and deploy their own parking attendants in designated areas, and any fines levied go to local authorities to help defray the costs of that service.

Bail Offenders

9. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends to take to deal with repeated offenders who commit crimes while still on bail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are examining carefully the evidence from a number of recent studies by the police and others of the extent of offending on bail, and considering, in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers and others, what further action might reduce offending by people released on bail. We will announce our conclusions in February.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that more could be done in the first instance to prevent offences? Is he aware of the excellent work being done by Crime Concern? Will he produce his White Paper on the subject soon? Is he aware that one Bolton youth was arrested 30 times last year for car crimes?

Mr. Patten: The answer to the first of those three points is that the Home Secretary will shortly be publishing his promised and much looked forward to paper on criminal prevention. The answer to the second is that I agree that Crime Concern, which enjoys all-party support in the House, does excellent work. The answer to the third is that the Criminal Justice Act 1991 introduced new guidelines which can be passed from the magistrates to the social services to ensure that from October this year juveniles can be remanded in custody under certain conditions not previously available to the courts.

Mr. Lewis: Is the Minister aware that not only juveniles but adults are committing crimes while on bail and that many crimes now being committed by adults while on bail involve firearms? Does he agree that it is time we had a real clampdown on the possession of firearms throughout society, remembering that the problem will not be cured unless the Home Office takes strenuous action in relation to the legal as well as the illegal holding of firearms?

Mr. Patten: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the recent rise in the number of crimes involving firearms. There were about 9,000 last year, of which about only 4 per cent. involved replica firearms. We have the toughest sentences available in any country in western Europe for the carrying of firearms. Carrying a firearm in the commission of a crime can attract up to a life sentence. New sentences became available to the courts with the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and quite right too.

Mr. Barry Field: May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the delegation that I led to the Lord Chancellor to consider the problem of bail bandits and light sentencing by Crown courts, and to the concern in my constituency that the Hampshire police authority is short changing the Isle of Wight in terms of the number of constables on the beat?

Mr. Patten: The answer to my hon. Friend's last point is that when the Secretary of State made his announcement about the additional real 1,000 police coming on stream this year, he said that 80 per cent. of them should go straight on to the beat. The answer to his first point is that it is absolutely clear that a number of people who break their bail conditions are remanded in custody when they are brought back to the court; but that happens in only about six out of 10 cases, and in four out of 10 cases when those who break their bail conditions are brought back to the court, it seems that they are no longer remanded in custody but are again let out on bail.

Mr. Hattersley: On the subject of repeated offences, will the junior Minister now say why crime has risen on average by 6 per cent. each year since the war but rose by 18 per cent. last year?

Mr. Patten: There are a number of reasons for crime. You, Mr. Speaker, would not permit me to give a full answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question, which reminds me of a minute that I sent out, when I went to the Home Office in 1987, to the then permanent secretary. It simply said, "Please, what causes crime?" Reasonably enough, I have never had an answer. The decisions of individual men and women to commit bad acts is what causes crime. It is no good the Labour party seeking again and again—as it did this morning—excuses for why people offend. Rather, it should look for ways of dealing with those people when they have offended and ways of preventing offending.

Mr. Shersby: Has my right hon. Friend had a chance yet to read the excellent report submitted to him by the chief constable of Northumbria about the problem of constant reoffending on bail? Is he aware that that

problem is made worse by a small hard core of young criminals who offend again and again, but that that is not always known to the justices? What action does my right hon. Friend intend to take?

Mr. Patten: As I said in answer to the main question, in the announcement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I will make in February, we shall be able to give a fuller answer than I can give now. We have in the Home Office a copy of the very helpful report by the chief constable of Northumbria and we have also been greatly assisted by the work of the members of the Police Federation, who have co-operated in the analysis of the serious problem of offending on bail.

Life Imprisonment

10. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the guidelines for the period of imprisonment to be served before prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment will be released on licence.

Mrs. Rumbold: The main considerations in deciding whether to release such a prisoner are whether he or she has been detained long enough to satisfy the requirements of retribution and deterrence for the offence and whether the potential risk to the public is judged to be acceptable.

Mr. Trimble: The Minister will be aware of my concern about the period of imprisonment served by persons who murder members of the security forces. A clear disparity exists between the guideline in England and Wales of 20-plus years' imprisonment and the practice in Northern Ireland of about 13 years' imprisonment before murderers of soldiers and policemen are released. Does the Minister agree that if that issue came before the European Court of Human Rights, under the reasoning in the Dudgeon case, the court would almost certainly hold that it is contrary to the anti-discrimination article in the convention to have two different regimes operating within one country? Would it not, be advisable, therefore, to have a uniform regime—which need not necessarily be the same as either existing regime—rather than wait until such a system is imposed on us?

Mrs. Rumbold: What the European Court of Justice may decide is a matter of pure speculation. In essence, the matter is for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in some classes of cases, retribution and deterrence are never satisfactory? In the case of terrorist crimes, it is about time that we had a sentence of indefinite imprisonment until terrorism ends.

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is right. We regard murders committed in this country by terrorists as deserving a minimum of 20 years' imprisonment for those people. That marks the public's revulsion at acts of gratuitous violence against innocent victims. No matter for how long a period lifers are detained, the Home Secretary will release those people only if he considers that it is safe to do so.

Parliamentary Representation

11. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the level of parliamentary representation from England; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: In the past 12 months, we have received four letters on this subject from hon. Members. A private Member's motion was debated in the House on 8 March 1991.

Mr. Dunn: I wish to put two propositions to my right hon. Friend: first, the English are under-represented in the House; and, secondly, the Scots are over-represented here. If my right hon. Friend agrees with either or both contentions, what will the Government do about that?

Mrs. Rumbold: Occasionally, when I am ironing, I consider the possibility of having a constituency which is called Mitcham, Morden and Mole Valley. That is not, however, a possibility, because my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) represents an area a little bit down the road in the county of Surrey. I am told that the same considerations of constituency difficulty, demography and geography would apply to rearranging the constituencies within Scotland. It is for that reason, I believe, that the Government have decided that we should maintain the present system.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Minister aware that the hon. Member for Dartford—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) will pay attention for a moment. Is the Minister aware that the hon. Gentleman is quite right to worry about the level of representation in England because every time a Tory is defeated in Scotland he flees the country, comes down here and tries to get a Tory seat? I refer, for example, to the hon. Member for Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), Ian Sproat, Michael Ancram, and Gerry Malone. The problem for the hon. Member for Dartford is that, once he has been defeated at the next election, he will be replaced as a candidate by the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth).

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman might reflect on the fact that those Scotsmen who come down here to represent English constituencies are the best of the Scotsmen, who choose to come down here to represent one of the 523 constituencies in this country.

Mr. Ian Bruce: My right hon. Friend will know that there has been a large influx of people into Dorset, including many people from Scotland and from Wales. If my hon. Friend will look at the recommendations already coming from the Boundary Commission, she will see that it recommends that there should be eight rather than seven seats in Dorset. That would have some benefit in the forthcoming election if she could push it through. I wonder whether she can.

Mrs. Rumbold: The whole House will be very relieved to know that such a matter is not entirely in a Minister's hands. I understand that, if that change occurs, the Conservative party will certainly benefit by an extra constituency.

Mr. Maclennan: Does the Minister accept that when the wishes of the people of Scotland are reflected in the decision to set up a Scottish parliament, it will indeed

make sense to reduce the representation of Scots in the House? Does she recognise that the inequity and injustice done to her party through, for example, no Conservative Members of Parliament being returned in 12 Glasgow constituencies would be redressed by the granting of proportional representation throughout the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am not persuaded by the hon. Gentleman's arguments that to have proportional representation would necessarily persuade Glaswegians to vote Conservative. I hope that the Government's policies will persuade Glaswegians to think carefully about whether to vote Conservative in the next general election.

Sir Peter Emery: Seriously, as the Boundary Commission proceeds with its report over the next 10 years, would not it be correct to ensure that all parts of the United Kingdom had the same proportion of representatives? That would solve the whole problem.

Mrs. Rumbold: As my hon. Friend knows, this matter has been discussed quite recently within both the Government and the Home Affairs Select Committee. Equitable representation is very hard to achieve. When the Boundary Commission looks at these matters over every 10 years or so, demography and demographic conditions have to be considered, and it is less easy than it appears on paper simply to provide consistency in terms of the demographic relationship of the people living in the country and the number of Members representing them in the House. Inevitably, it would mean that there would be more and more people coming into the House to represent constituencies unless some kind of control were exercised.

Mr. Darling: I think that the Minister is saying that the Government's view is that the basis of representation should remain the same—in which case, I am glad. Will she tell some of her hon. Friends that a recent independent study has shown that if the basis of representation in Scotland were equated with that in England, the Conservative party in Scotland would cease to be an endangered species and become an extinct species? Some of the remarks made by Conservative Members show the foresight and planning of the dodo.

Mrs. Rumbold: I suspect that these matters will be discussed on a number of occasions in the future, but the Opposition should not be too complacent about the attitudes and voting patterns of those north of the border for ever and a day.

Vehicle Security

12. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from motor car manufacturers regarding their intentions to improve motor car security.

14. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on initiatives taken to improve vehicle security.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have had three meetings with car manufacturers. I will be meeting them again in March. I have urged manufacturers to fit to all new cars dead-locks, immobilisation devices and visible identification numbers. I am pleased that they have responded very positively.

Car crime, principally by young males, accounts for nearly 30 per cent. of all recorded crime. Our major crime prevention campaign this year will be against car crime, and the courts will soon have available the additional penalties under the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful for that reply. When the Home Secretary meets the car manufacturers in March, will he impress on them the seriousness of the situation and consider compelling them to fit such devices as standard, bearing in mind that, last weekend alone, £100,000 worth of damage was caused by car theft in my constituency?

Mr. Baker: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support. When I first met the car manufacturers, they did not appear to be taking the matter very seriously at all, but my last meeting with them revealed that they are now much more prepared to make their cars more secure. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. Whether we can make it compulsory for cars to be fitted with such devices is a matter for the European Commission. My Department and the Secretary of State for Transport have already made submissions to the Commission that a standard high level of security—as high as we have in Britain—should be enforced across Europe.

Mr. Roger King: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his initiative in talking to the manufacturers about improved vehicle security. Will he tell the House what support he has had for his additional measure, the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill, which will surely go a long way towards stopping the theft of motor vehicles? Will he assure the House that he has had the unreserved support of the Opposition during the passage of that Bill?

Mr. Baker: Regrettably, we did not receive very much support because, in Committee, the Opposition voted against the major proposals in the Bill. That is the trouble with the Labour party: one has to distinguish between its rhetoric and reality when it comes to law and order. This morning, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that he wanted to see more policemen on the beat, yet when he was a member of the last Labour Cabinet he cut the number of policemen and left the police force under strength.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Home Secretary confirm that he is about to launch a £5 million campaign involving the glitzy television commercials that have been his trademark in every office of state that he has held? Is not it a fact that he never learns from experience? Last year, his May campaign—national crime prevention week—cost £4·5 million, yet the three-months' figures for crime following that expenditure showed an upsurge in crime. When will the Government spend less on advertising and more on the police and crime prevention?

Mr. Baker: We have increased expenditure on crime prevention and the police much more than the previous Labour Government, who cut it by 3 per cent. I can confirm, however, that on 11 February I shall announce a major campaign—car crime prevention year. It will be a highly successful campaign and will cost £5 million. It will be supported by BMW, Citroen, Ford, Honda, Peugeot, Renault, Rover, Toyota, Vauxhall, Volkswagen and Volvo and most of the major insurance companies in Britain. They are uniting with us to reduce crime.

The hon. Gentleman again raised the question of law and order. I shall be only too pleased to fight the next election on the basis of the record on law and order and to show that we have a very much better record than the last Labour Government.

Mr. Favell: In reply to the main question, my right hon. Friend said that he had had discussions with motor vehicle manufacturers. Has he had any discussions with motor vehicle insurers? Many criteria are used to determine motor vehicle insurance premiums. Should not anti-theft devices be one of them? As someone who has recently paid an enormously increased premium, I think that that would be an excellent idea.

Mr. Baker: I met the insurance companies of Britain on three occasions. In October, they issued a new set of tariffs which provide that a car owner who suffers a loss has to make a larger contribution and introduce the principle and concept of a premium reduction for certain security devices.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before we proceed to Prime Minister's Questions, may I remind the House of what I said on Tuesday? Questions on matters of policy should relate to policy options available to the Prime Minister. They should not consist of invitations to comment directly on the policies of other parties in the House, for which the Prime Minister has no responsibility.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Barnes: The Prime Minister has cut 110,000 training places in the past year. Furthermore, training schemes do not produce the skills or the qualifications for the jobs that are needed in Britain at this time. Is that because, as the Prime Minister said in another interview with Sue Lawley, from his point of view qualifications "are wholly useless"?

The Prime Minister: Despite the unfavourable economic climate, both youth training and employment training continue to help young and unemployed people on a very substantial scale to go into further training and further education. Very large numbers of young people are being helped. We are investing enormous sums in training, in enterprise and in vocational education—two and a half times as much, after taking account of inflation, as was invested by the Labour party when it was last in government.

Romford (Visit)

Q2. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Prime Minister whether he has any plans to make an official visit to Romford.

The Prime Minister: I am making a series of visits to all parts of the country, and very much hope to include Essex among them.

Sir Michael Neubert: Will my right hon. Friend be assured that any time that he cares to come to Romford, Essex men and Essex women will throng the streets in their thousands? In the meantime, will he give my constituents an assurance that he welcomes the report of the three wise men on primary education, and that the Government fully subscribe to the importance of the three Rs? Will he confirm that it is our top priority to get back to the basics in education and to sweep away the leftist progressive teaching methods that, having been put to the test, have failed?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend couches his invitation to visit Essex in irresistible terms.

The report that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State published yesterday is extremely important. It challenges some of the teaching methods that have been used in recent years and it suggests that schools should concentrate on commonsense, practical teaching. I believe that that is what parents want and that it is the best way to ensure that children are taught the essentials. We certainly hope that both schools and teachers will adopt the proposals in the report.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Taylor: The Prime Minister will be well aware of the appalling environmental problems in the Fal estuary arising from the water pollution after the closure of the Wheal Jane mine. I do not think that people in Cornwall want to allocate blame at the moment, but they do want to ensure that the environmental clean-up is carried out both in the short term and the long term without hold-ups. Will the Prime Minister ensure that there are no financial problems at any stage in ensuring that the long-term and short-term clean-ups take place?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we set up the National Rivers Authority specifically to respond in the first instance to the sort of pollution incidents to which he refers—this one is a very serious incident. The NRA has been closely monitoring the situation since the mine closed. It had developed contingency plans before the incident and put them into effect when water in the mine began to overflow. I am sure that the NRA considers that it will be able to deal with the problem with the resources that it has.

Q4. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Coombs: Has my right hon. Friend seen the reports from the German chambers of commerce which show that German industry has invested £7·8 billion in this country

in recent years? Does not that demonstrate that low taxation, low inflation and good industrial relations are the basis for strong investment, including inward investment; and does it not also show that the future of this country is excellent under this Government?

The Prime Minister: I have seen the report to which my hon. Friend refers. I have also seen the important comments of the CBI, which set out the fact that Britain now attracts nearly half of all the inward investment from Japan that comes to the European Community. I believe that, by investing here, German and Japanese companies and those of other countries have shown their confidence in the British economy. It is a shame that some of the gloom and doom-mongers in this country do not share that confidence.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister confirm that under his Government the British economy is in its longest recession since the second world war?

The Prime Minister: I will confirm to the right hon. Gentleman, as I am sure that he will be pleased to hear what the European Community has to say, that the United Kingdom is the only country where signals of a sustained economic recovery are discernible, by contrast with a tendency towards gradual slackening of growth continuing in Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Mr. Kinnock: Slightly closer to home, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the British chambers of commerce today report that this is the seventh consecutive quarter in which the United Kingdom economy has suffered from recession, with levels of economic activity continuing to decline? Is not it clear that the recession caused by the Prime Minister's policies is continuing because of the Prime Minister's paralysis?

The Prime Minister: The British chambers of commerce are clearly wrong about the seventh consecutive quarter. That would imply that the recession started in the second quarter of 1990, which it clearly did not, because output rose between the first and second quarters of 1990.

I notice also that the president of the chambers of commerce said that British industry and commerce were on

"an improving trend of slowly and steadily climbing out of the recession".

Mr. Kinnock: Will not the Prime Minister refer to the report and listen to the voices of business and commerce from all over the country when they say:

"A worsening position on employment expectations,"—

higher job losses—

"and a major down-grading of business confidence, however, give no cause for comfort in this survey"?

How can the Prime Minister be so complacent and so indolent when he is receiving advice that something now needs to be done?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman was clearly not listening. I quoted from the president of that particular group of chambers of commerce. The report itself says:

"an improving trend of slowly and steadily climbing out of the recession."

The right hon. Gentleman should look at other surveys and forecasters. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund both forecast recovery. What is equally clear among business men is that they have no enthusiasm whatever for a Labour Government. A survey of the top hundred British companies showed that 63 per cent. of them believed that recession would get worse under a Labour Government, and not one of them believed that it would get better.

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: Will my right hon. Friend find time today to tell the House of the decision made yesterday to restore to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia the gold deposited for safe keeping in the Bank of England but misappropriated by the then Labour Government with the support in the Division Lobby of the leader and Chief Whip of the Liberal party at that time?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly confirm to my hon. Friend that when I met President Landsbergis yesterday I was able to indicate that we would be returning the gold. As the House well knows, the Labour Government in 1967 ordered the gold to be sold. The then Conservative Opposition roundly opposed that, and I am delighted that this Conservative Government have been able to correct that smear of dishonour.

United Nations

Q5. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next expects to pay an official visit to the United Nations.

The Prime Minister: I shall chair a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on 31 January.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Prime Minister confirm that 140 nations have signed the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty, including Tory Canada? Why cannot this Tory Government honour their pledge under the treaty to get rid of nuclear weapons, which will mean the withdrawal of Polaris—which is literally cracking up—and the saving of £10 billion on Trident, to be spent on the national health service to care for lives instead of threatening them with mass murder?

If nuclear non-proliferation——

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is very unseemly.

Mr. Cryer: Quite so, Mr. Speaker.

If nuclear non-proliferation is good enough for the rest of the world, why is not it good enough for us?

The Prime Minister: We seek to promote non-proliferation and disarmament, and that will be one of the matters to be discussed at the United Nations Security Council meeting that I shall chair next week. But I must say to the hon. Gentleman who suggests that it would be appropriate at present for this country to scrap its nuclear weapons and Trident that to do so would leave the country wholly defenceless. That may be the view of the hon. Gentleman. It may even be the view of right hon. Gentlemen opposite in their secret hearts. It is not the right policy for this country, it is not the policy of the Government and I hope that the Opposition will make clear how many of their members support that policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament rather than a policy of secure defences for this country.

Mr. Bellingham: When my right hon. Friend visits the United Nations, will he raise the issue of the RAF aircrew

who were shot down over the Gulf, some of whom came from west Norfolk? They were tortured, humiliated and abused in gross contravention of the Geneva convention. Is it time that the perpetrators of the crime were brought to justice?

The Prime Minister: I strongly share the view expressed by my hon. Friend. I do not think that it is a matter for discussion at the special Security Council meeting next week; it is certainly a matter which remains on our agenda.

Engagements

Q6. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Douglas: The Prime Minister's view of an expanded Europea, Community, composed of many states in eastern Europea together with existing members, is extremely attractive, but will he contrast that with the instability within the United Kingdom because the aspirations of a nationwide Scotland are frustrated by its being unable to secure its independence and membership of the Community? Will he take steps to have that issue ventilated in a multi-question referendum of the people, which could perhaps be held in harmony with the general election?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he had to say about the European Community. That is the right way forward for this country, the European Community and the wider Europe which I hope in due course will join the Community. The hon. Gentleman spoke about devolution. The Union has served Scotland and England well. In terms of a debate, he will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has called for debates in the Scottish Grand Committee and I hope that everyone will contribute to them.

Q7. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mans: Will my right hon. Friend encourage the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to increase the top limit on national insurance contributions because of the plight in which that would place many of my constituents and people in neighbouring Blackpool who earn under £15,000 a year but during the holiday season earn more than £400 a week?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will need no such encouragement. The policy suggested by my hon. Friend would hit many people on modest incomes who have bonus or overtime earnings and who occasionally earn above £390 a week. Such an impost would be quite contrary to the policies of the Government and the Conservative party and we shall not introduce any such policy.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House please tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 27 JANUARY—Motions on the Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order and the Electricity (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order

TUESDAY 28 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Prison Security Bill.

Motion on the Uncertificated Securities Regulations

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at Seven o'clock.

WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Education (Schools) Bill.

THURSDAY 30 JANUARY—Motions on the English revenue support grant reports, followed by motions on the Welsh revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 31 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Until Seven o'clock, Private Members' motions.

Motions on the Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order and the African Development Fund (Sixth Replenishment) Order.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 29 January to consider European Community documents Nos. 7573/91, 8122/91 and 10157/91 relating to satellite broadcasting standards.

[Wednesday 29 January 1992

European Standing Committee B

Relevant European Community Documents

(a) 7573/91 Satellite Broadcasting of Television Signals

(b) 8122-91 Programmes for High Definition Television Services

(c) 10157/91 Satellite Broadcasting of Television Signals

Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 29-xxx (1990-91), HC 24-ii (1991-92) and HC 24-v (1991-92)

(b) HC 24-iv (1991-92)

(c) HC 24-vii (1991-92)

Thursday 30 January

English Revenue Support Grant Reports

1. *Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93*
2. *Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England)*
3. *The Population Report (England) (No. 3)*
4. *The Special Grant Report (No. 3)*

Welsh Revenue Support Grant Reports

1. *Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1992-93 (HC 151)*
2. *Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 3) (HC 152)*
3. *Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 3) (HC 153).]*

Dr. Cunningham: May I begin by thanking the Leader of the House for responding so promptly to our request for debates on the revenue support grant orders for England and Wales? Will he assure us that, before the House rises tomorrow, we shall have the revenue support grant order documents for England available in the Vote Office? I realise that the debate is not until Thursday, but I am sure that it would be helpful to the House to have the documents that are the subject of the debate.

On the same subject, will the Leader of the House arrange for his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to make a statement on the latest poll tax fiasco—the decision by the courts not to allow computer evidence to be used by local authorities in pursuit of more than 7 million claims for non-payment? Does not this latest poll tax mess confirm everything that we have said from the Dispatch Box about the grotesque inefficiency of this capricious and unfair tax? Ought we not to have a statement as soon as possible to help local authorities and to inform all those people who are paying the tax about exactly what the Government intend to do?

Why does not the Leader of the House help his hon. Friends and the Opposition by giving us more Supply day time? We are always hearing bogus claims by Conservative Members that they want more time to debate Labour party policy. We too should like to debate policies on industry, especially in view of the latest fall in industrial output and the awful news contained in the report of the Associated British Chambers of Commerce. But yet again the Leader of the House is denying the Opposition the opportunity to choose the subject for debate by not providing Supply day time. Will he assure us that he will provide some time the week after next?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said about the orders being brought forward. As he knows, it is necessary to debate them very soon. That is relevant to the question about Supply days, to which I shall return in a moment. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the orders will be published and will be available in the Vote Office tomorrow.

On his second point, about the community charge and its enforcement, the hon. Gentleman will know that there is a considerable distinction between the community charge and the procedures in the magistrates courts when people do not pay their community charge and local authorities take action against them. The two are distinct. There is no reason why people should not pay their community charge: that is the most important point on the issue.

As for the proceedings in the magistrates courts, the Government are looking urgently at the matter. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are giving it great attention. There is nothing in that aspect which means in any way that people should not be paying their community charge, because there are many people on comparatively low incomes who may have to suffer because others are not paying. I hope that no one in the House will do anything but encourage people to pay the community charge.

On the third point, about Supply days, we had a debate only yesterday on economic matters; industrial matters could have been included in that. The hon. Gentleman will know that we have two Supply day debates today. He will see from the business next week that there are a number of

matters which are very important, and he will see that there is private business. I shall see what I can do about another Supply day in the week after that.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call Back Benchers, may I remind them that we have today two debates, both of which are heavily over-subscribed? I have no ability to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches today. Furthermore, there is another statement. I propose to limit business questions to go on until 4 o'clock, when we shall move to the next statement. May I remind the House that questions should be directed to business next week and not to wider issues for which there may be other opportunities?

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will my right hon. Friend consider, as there is no debate on the subject next week, the urgent necessity for a full debate on civil air transport policy, since the chairman of the Association of European Airlines and boss of Alitalia has warned that next summer, unless something urgent is done to overhaul air traffic control systems in Europe, the whole air transport industry may snarl up and gradually come to a halt?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend will know that we are at the stage in the process where a large number of Bills are coming from the other place or from Committees. That business is taking a considerable amount of the time of the House, rightly and inevitably. I cannot therefore promise my hon. Friend an early debate on the subject.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I refer the Leader of the House to the answer given by the Prime Minister a moment ago about the need for debates in the Scottish Grand Committee on the future government of Scotland? Will he use his good offices to try to get those debates under way? They are long overdue. The Secretary of State for Scotland seems to think that we can have them without a statement on Government policy on the future government of Scotland. That is what we want.

Mr. MacGregor: We have offered to have debates. My right hon. Friend has indicated that he would like to see them and has suggested that that is an appropriate way of having all the issues fully aired. I hope that discussions are under way to achieve that.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week to debate early-day motion 448, standing in my name and supported by a substantial number of hon. Members from all parties, welcoming the Government's support for the repeal of the infamous "Zionism is racism" resolution of the United Nations?

[That this House welcomes the decision of the United Nations general assembly to repeal the notorious U.N.G.A. Resolution 3379/75 of 10th November 1975, normally known as the 'Zionism is Racism' resolution; congratulates Her Majesty's Government for ensuring that the United Kingdom voted for repeal, just as it originally voted against the 1975 resolution; thanks President Bush for leading the diplomatic activity which produced the repeal of that infamous slur on the Jewish people; but notes with regret that 25 nations voted against repeal, including such totalitarian dictatorships as Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea and Syria.]

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to that resolution. As we have made clear, we warmly welcome the repeal of the resolution. We co-sponsored the repealing resolution and played a full part in ensuring that it was adopted by an overwhelming majority.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that there have been very disturbing reports this week about Fisons' pharmaceutical production standards by the American Food and Drug Administration, but that British inspectors' reports are kept secret? As the public are the consumers of these goods, may we have a debate next week so that we can discuss that very important information?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a debate next week. The right hon. Gentleman has other ways of raising the matter, but I shall draw his point to the attention of my right hon. Friends.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): My right hon. Friend referred to the discussions that are to take place next Wednesday in European Standing Committee B on European satellite standards. He will be aware that the draft directive under discussion would, if implemented, commit the spending of many millions of pounds of European taxpayers' money to propagating a transmission system that virtually nobody in Europe would be able to watch. Expenditure of that magnitude might be a mere bagatelle to those who sit on the Opposition Benches, but the Department of Trade and Industry, and those who sit on this side of the House, are resisting that draft directive. Can my right hon. Friend find time for the whole House to debate that issue, so that a very clear message can be sent to the European Commission?

Mr. MacGregor: It would not be appropriate for the whole House to debate the matter, because the Standing Committee is to consider it next week. However, I would point out to my hon. Friend, who I know takes a great interest in these matters, that part of the new European Standing Committee process is that we very much hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House who have an interest in a particular subject will attend the meetings. In that way, they will be able to make their points. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to do that next week. Moreover, the report of the Standing Committee will eventually be debated on the Floor of the House.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Could we have additional information, perhaps by means of a statement next week, about those whose homes are being repossessed? Only this morning, I tried to intervene on behalf of a constituent whose home is being repossessed. When I reminded the lending society of what we had been told last week in the House of Commons, I was told, "We do not know very much about it; discussions are continuing, and it will be some time before any decisions are made." In the meantime, many thousands of people are in the greatest anxiety about what will happen to them. Can we be given an update?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have been pleased to see that one building society has now reached agreement on the mortgages-to-rents scheme. That has already been announced. He will also know that, when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the

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Exchequer made his statement in December on the outcome of the talks with the building societies, we intimated that we should be introducing a Bill to deal with the social security aspects. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has introduced that Bill today, and the House will have an opportunity to debate it shortly.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate next week on the community care programme so that we can be told how it is to be imlemented by the Government? A number of my constituents and their relatives are very anxious about the proposed closure of Westwood hospital in Bradford. If that hospital is closed, there will be nowhere for mentally handicapped people to go, if community care is a failure, and I suspect that to be the case in many areas. This is an urgent and increasing problem. The Government ought to provide time for a debate on the subject.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman noted that successive Governments have adopted a community care policy. Such a policy is now being implemented by the Government, with considerable expenditure. Spending on the social services has gone up faster, in real terms, than the number of elderly people. Nearly £2 billion is being spent to provide support for people in their own surroundings in the community. That policy involves considerable expenditure. I cannot promise a debate next week on the particular example that the hon. Gentleman gave.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): May we have a debate on the circumstances surrounding the resignation of the leader of Derbyshire county council, whose policies have led to redundancy for hundreds of teachers yet who has managed to ensure for himself a well-paid part-time job, at a salary equivalent to £40,000 a year, with the loss-making, council-controlled Derbyshire enterprise board? Is that not a unique example of the rat building himself a cosy lifeboat before abandoning the ship that he himself has sunk?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend will find many opportunities to draw attention to the great inadequacies of Derbyshire county council. I have certainly found much about it to criticise when visiting the county, not least when I was Secretary of State for Education and Science. I hope that my hon. Friend will find ways of raising that point in the House again.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 546 on the subject of software piracy?

[That this House notes that the culture of criminality at Mirror Group Newspapers continues; expresses concern that much of the computer software used by the Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror was illicit; welcomes the news that a substantial sum has been paid by MGN plc to the programme manufacturers in compensation; and urges MGN directors to consider resignation in recognition of the mismanagement perpetuated under Robert Maxwell and his successor.]

Will he please find time in the business of the House next week for a debate on the subject of software piracy and the continuing culture of illegality at Mirror Group Newspapers? What advice would he give Sir Peter Parker, a supporter of the Liberal Democrats, who has suggested that he will clean that Augean stable?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that, regrettably, the illicit use of computer software is widespread. I have indeed seen my hon. Friend's early-day motion. Copyright owners are actively enforcing their statutory rights against such activities in both the public and private sectors. The Government welcome the fact that several bodies have reached mutually acceptable agreements with the copyright owners.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): May I refer the Leader of the House to a matter of extreme urgency, which I referred to him on 11 December, regarding the total moratorium on public expenditure in Northern Ireland, both capital and revenue, and to the dire consequences of that for commerce, industry and employment? On 11 December, the right hon. Gentleman generously said that he would refer that matter to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but the only reply that I have received is a letter that was dated the day before a certain written answer was tabled in the Library, giving no details whatsoever. It is absolutely imperative that at least the Members of Parliament for Northern Ireland, if not the House as a whole, should debate the fact that there is a total ban on public expenditure in Northern Ireland. We are told that we could debate this in the spring estimates, but that would be too late in the fiscal year.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that there has been no reduction in the total volume of public expenditure in Northern Ireland that is planned for this year. It is currently running at £6·5 billion. The moratorium relates to new contracts only and, at most, will last until the end of this financial year. Work on contracts already let is unaffected. Clearly, it is necessary to keep within the total public expenditure plans. That is part of good budgeting and that is why the moratorium has had to be introduced.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): In our debates on the Education (Schools) Bill, will it be in order to refer to the threat to education standards and parental choice, the suggested abolition of grammar schools, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges, and to the threat of an increase in private school fees of 30 per cent?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend knows that I am strongly supportive of the positive aspects of those policies, and would be extremely concerned at any suggestion that the policies of other parties might have a severe effect upon them. Given that the Education (Schools) Bill relates to the whole issue of greater choice for parents and to greater parental knowledge of what is available in our schools, I expect that some of his points will be within the terms of the Third Reading debate at least.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Leader of the House make time for an early debate on the minimum wage? Is he aware that 4·5 million people in this country would benefit from a minimum wage, of whom 80 per cent. are women? Before we get the usual propaganda from central office, will he explain why all our EC partners and our main competitors, such as Australia, New Zealand

and the United States, have a minimum wage which appears to cause them no problems? Is it not time that we came into the 21st century?

Mr. MacGregor: I would certainly be happy to find time for a debate on the minimum wage to enable us to refute the charge that so many of those other countries have minimum wage proposals precisely along the lines advocated by the Labour party.

Such a debate would also enable us to state the serious danger to jobs, including part-time jobs, and the big increase in unemployment that would result from a minimum wage. It would also enable us to bring out the fact that, as a result of the Labour party's support for the social chapter, national insurance contributions would also be brought to bear on many part-time workers, thus reducing their incomes. I would be happy to have such a debate, but it cannot be next week.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): May we have a debate on the future management of Government business in the House? My right hon. Friend may have noted that the Leader of the Opposition has announced today that he predicts that a Labour Government after the general election would have a majority of 20. My right hon. Friend will also note that yesterday an amendment was tabled by 25 Labour Members in which they called for socialist policies, arms cuts, harnessing of the national savings—whatever that means—and restoration of so-called trade union rights. During such a debate, could not the Leader of the Opposition tell us whether he would capitulate to the demands of such a group, and, if not, how he would control it?

Mr. MacGregor: We do not need a debate on the management of the House to explore those points. Indeed, they were made effectively yesterday. There will be other opportunities for raising precisely those points without such a debate, and I hope that my hon. Friend will find the time to do so. I am sure that he agrees with me that there is no basis for the Leader of the Opposition's expectation of such a majority.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House consult the Secretary of State for Health about the alarming state of affairs at the John Radcliffe hospital at Bicester? In November last year, Fred Hobson, 62, with heart trouble, went in for a heart operation. He was there three days and was then turned away because there were not sufficient facilities. In December he went back and got the same treatment. In January, he was told not to come. Three days ago, he was turned away again. Will the Leader of the House make sure that those Tory spivs who run the health service in Oxfordshire are the ones who are turned away—rather than Fred Hobson, who was turned away from the hospital—and get the operation done?

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) can tell us where in Bicester there is a John Radcliffe hospital? No such place exists.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for what is said here. I am sure that the Leader of the House will know about that.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not know the details of that case, and it sounds as if the hon. Gentleman may not either. I know that the hospital is not in his constituency, so it is not appropriate for him to seek ways of raising the matter in the House. Certainly, I would be happy to have many opportunities in the House to debate the great success and progress made under our national health service reforms.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will have noted that, despite yesterday's debate on the autumn statement, there is still widespread ignorance among some hon. Members about the optimism about the United Kingdom economy shown by distinguished bodies abroad. With that in mind, I have a suggestion. Will my right hon. Friend consider, in advance of the next economic debate—I am sorry that it is not next week—tabling a list of quotations from bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Community, so that we can start the debate with the facts? That might help right hon. and hon. Gentlemen to conclude with the facts.

Mr. MacGregor: We can certainly consider that suggestion. I am sure that my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry would wish to consider it. But every time that favourable comments are made about the United Kingdom economy—including, for example, that made by the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce about the successful operation of German-owned companies in the United Kingdom—which contrasted with the view that it took of industrial relations in the 1970s, the Labour party seeks to shout them down because it does not want to know.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the right hon. Gentleman consider arranging a debate next week on the plight of the homeless? Does he realise that, of the 180,000 homeless people, 156,000 are between 16 and 25, that one in four children are homeless and that 34,000 of them are in Scotland? Could he also do something about debating the 53,000 people now in bed-and-breakfast accommodation?

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Gentleman said that one in four children were homeless, I am sure that he did not mean to say it. That is a ludicrous charge. We have debated these matters in the House. The Government have taken considerable steps to provide facilities for the homeless. There is not an opportunity for a debate on the matter next week, but it might be possible to make some remarks about it during Thursday's business. I cannot promise any debate next week.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the Leader of the House consider changing the order of business next week so that there may be an urgent debate on pensioners and unearned income? *[Interruption.]* Bearing in mind the Labour party's policy of imposing a 9 per cent. surcharge on unearned income over £3,000, we have a duty to tell millions of pensioners the disastrous effects that the Opposition's policies would have on their life style and means of survival. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. MacGregor: I am afraid that I do not see, within the terms of next week's business, the opportunity to debate that subject, but I hope that before too long we can yet again raise the question of what the Labour party is saying about tax on investment income, which would clearly affect many people with modest incomes, many with incomes well below £20,000. From the noises which

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have just been made, it would once again seem that there is a considerable lack of clarity about the Opposition's tax policies. The more we hear from them, the more we realise that the amount of revenue is decreasing and therefore the gap between their expenditure and tax policies is getting greater.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Wales to come to the House early next week to clarify the major initiative, which he announced in the *Liverpool Daily Post* yesterday, to set up an all-Wales body, nominated by him, which would include representatives from the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry, local government and some hon. Members from the House, to—in the words of the statement—help him "to run Wales"? Should a statement on that matter not have been made to the House rather than leaked to the *Liverpool Daily Post*? If that is Government policy, surely we need a statement at an early date.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall discuss the matter with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): May we have a debate on attempts to suppress democratic discussion of vital national issues in light of the decision of Mirror Group Newspapers—for so long, the voice of Robert Maxwell—to refuse paid advertising from a political party and consequently deny their hard-pressed pensioners some revenue?

Mr. MacGregor: If I can guess at what my hon. Friend is referring to, if the group will not take the advertising, we shall certainly get the case over in many other ways to the people who are likely to be affected by Labour's tax and spending policies.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): May I return the Leader of the House to the issue that I raised last week—the illegal use of computer evidence in magistrates courts? He told me last week and the shadow Leader of the House today that the Government were giving that matter urgent consideration. Has he seen early-day motion 539, which I tabled last night after the judgment given by the senior stipendiary magistrate, Mr. Christopher Bourke, after five days study?

[That this House notes the decision of Mr. Christopher Bourke, the Clerkenwell stipendiary magistrate, on Tuesday 22nd January, to reject the use of computer records in magistrates' courts as amounting to hearsay evidence; believes that this stems from the failure of the Home Office to issue the appropriate commencement order to the Civil Evidence Act 1968; believes that, in regard to poll tax cases, the Government's options are limited, to either not extending the legal use of computer records, which presumably will require the presence of a council officer with personal knowledge of each individual case to swear on oath as to the particular individual circumstances, or to extend the use of the Act to allow the legal use of computer records and face a possible challenge on any of the seven million liability orders already granted in England and Wales, particularly those that led on to nearly 200 imprisonments; and calls for all poll tax cases to be halted until this is sorted out.]

That judgment backs up what I told the Leader of the House last week and what I have been telling the House for more than a year—that flawed procedures are being used in magistrates courts to railroad more than 7 million people through the courts and to put almost 200 people in prison. Why will the Leader of the House not announce not merely that urgent consideration is being given to the matter but that all poll tax cases will be halted forthwith until the situation is resolved?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already said that the Government are considering the matter urgently. Nothing that has happened in some recent cases provides any reason for people who are liable to pay the community charge failing to do so.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on education, and especially on the local authorities' responsibilities and their relationship with Government in terms of school organisation, so that I may highlight the need for an early decision on proposals to reorganise schools in Ealing, where parents, teachers and children will be greatly affected by those decisions?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise my hon. Friend Government time for that matter. However, he is aware that he can seek to find time to raise it in the House.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Will the Leader of the House look at early-day motion 291, which has been signed by 124 right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House?

[That this House regrets the Government's failure to deal with the imminent threat of wholesale breaches of the law on Sunday trading; expresses concern that Ministers appear to be running away from their responsibility to uphold the law as soon as one or more large commercial organisations express their intention to ignore the law; greatly regrets the way that this situation puts pressure on responsible and law-abiding retailers to open on Sundays simply to protect their market share; further regrets the damage that is likely to be done to small shops and family businesses as a consequence; considers that sensible progress to modernising the law should be made on the basis of the REST proposals put forward by Keep Sunday Special; and calls on the Government actively to pursue the regulation of Sunday trading in a way which deals fairly with employees, their families and with community and commercial interests.]

The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of yesterday's decision by the House, by 224 votes to 4, to do something about the shambles about the operation of the Shops Act 1950. Surely some time should be given next week so that we can debate this issue, especially when, today, in answer to Question 4, the Minister of State, Home Office told the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) that it would be a couple of months before we had the report from the law courts in Europe. That does not answer the burning problem of law-breaking on a Sunday, especially when the House has not been afforded the opportunity even to debate the matter in full so that a consensus of hon. Members can be taken. The Leader of the House should make time next week for this urgent matter to be discussed.

Mr. MacGregor: But the Government have already made clear their position on this matter. We had a full statement on the case that is now in the House of Lords and on the general discussion in relation to the reform of Sunday trading. The hon. Gentleman has been here sufficiently long to know that yesterday's decision by the

House was simply to give leave to bring in a Bill. The House did not take a decision on the Bill or express a view on it. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there are many views in the House about exactly what any reform of Sunday trading should involve. It is unlikely that the House will be able to consider a Bill on this matter in the remainder of this Session, given the amount of business that we have to do.

Mr. Speaker: Statement—Mr. Secretary King.

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I cannot take a point of order—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh".]—until after the statement. I must apply the same rules to those on the Front Benches as to those on the Back Benches. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about Tracey?"] This is taking up time, but if hon. Members are alleging that I took a point of order from the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), I did so because the Chair has to hear the point of order if it is alleged that something unparliamentary happened during the course of Question Time. Nothing had happened.

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am not taking it. The shadow Leader of the House cannot ask me to hear a point of order from the Front Bench when I am not prepared to hear them from those on the Back Benches.

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am sorry but I am not taking it until after the statement.

Dr. Cunningham: It arose out of business questions.

Mr. Speaker: It may have done.

Type 23 Frigates

4.2 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on a further order for type 23 frigates.

The type 23 frigate will form the backbone of the Royal Navy anti-submarine surface force in the future and is, in addition, a highly capable all-round warship. Four are already in service and six more are under construction. In June we invited tenders for up to three more frigates. The benefit of our competitive tendering policy was clearly shown in the extremely keen prices offered, which are significantly lower in real terms than previous ships. The benefits of privatisation of the yards and the greatly improved productivity now ensure better value for money for our own defence expenditure and help the yards themselves to compete once again overseas, as the opportunities with Malaysia and Oman have shown.

Before I turn to the outcome of the competition, I remind the House that the contract with the shipbuilder is for less than half the total estimated cost of the frigates. The larger part is made up by the host of specialised equipments that such a frigate contains. For some of those, contracts have yet to be awarded. But some are already known; for instance, the ships' 4·5 in gun will be ordered from VSEL—Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited—in Barrow, the machinery control equipment from Vosper Thornycroft in Porchester, the vertical launch Sea Wolf missiles from British Aerospace in Bristol. The two Spey gas turbine engines for each ship will be ordered from Rolls-Royce at Coventry, main gearing from GEC, Rugby and diesel generators from Paxman Diesels at Colchester. The shipbuilder will itself also have many sub-contractors. Hundreds of firms across the United Kingdom, large and small, will benefit from this order over the next few years, and its value will approach about £400 million.

On the results of the competition, I can tell the House that the tenders produced a winner by a very clear margin. We have accordingly decided to place a fixed-price contract for three type 23 frigates with Yarrow Shipbuilders on the Clyde. The construction of the first ship will start in the second half of this year. These ships will join the Duke class and will be named HMS Somerset, HMS Grafton and HMS Sutherland.

This is very good news for Glasgow, for Scotland as a whole, and for all the companies involved throughout the country. I recognise that it is, equally, a disappointment for the other yards which had tendered for the work, and for the people in those areas. However, this type 23 order is but one part of a substantial on-going programme of vessels for the Royal Navy. This will include a new anti-air warfare frigate, a second batch of Trafalgar class submarines and other significant vessels to ensure that we maintain a modern and effective navy in the future.

This order brings to 13 the number of type 23 frigates ordered since 1984, and the number of vessels ordered for the Royal Navy since 1979 to 71. It is yet more evidence that the Government are committed to ensuring the capability of the Royal Navy's fleet and to the wider aim of ensuring that our forces of the future have the modern equipment that they need.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I thank the Secretary of State for his welcome statement, made with great promptness, given the time scale. I offer my congratulations to the workers and management of Yarrow, who have picked themselves up after the bitter disappointment of losing the last order, despite having built the first of class and many of the subsequent ships.

Can the Secretary of State give the fabrication start date, an important issue for the progress of work for the yard and for the timetabling of entry into service? What does the right hon. Gentleman consider to be the size of the fleet? It has been postulated at "around 40". Perhaps he is now in a position to be more precise. When will the tendering process be opened for the craft to which he referred in his statement? That must be of great concern to the yards which were not successful in the tendering process, whose problems will become similar to those that confronted Yarrow until this afternoon. When does the right hon. Gentleman expect the next tranche of type 23 orders, to which he did not refer in his statement, to be in the pipeline and when can we expect the next round of tendering to start for those?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments. He recognises this for what it is—solid confirmation of the Government's determination to invest in the defence of our country. I will not go further than to say "around 40", but we certainly intend to implement the programme that we set out in "Options for Change". I can confirm that other ships are under way. We have a project definition of the landing platform dock. At present, other matters are proceeding, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman —I am grateful to him for seeking clarification—that in respect of a further order for type 23s, I expect that to be at a broadly similar interval comparing this with the previous order that was placed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say again what I said before business questions, namely, that there is heavy pressure on the next two debates. I shall allow questions to continue until 4.30, after which we shall have to move on to the debate.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that the machinery control order is to be placed with that fine company, Vosper Thornycroft, will be very good news in south Hampshire? Does he further agree that the fact that 71 vessels have been ordered by the Ministry of Defence since 1979 confirms what my hon. Friends and I have always believed —that under the present Government the Royal Navy will continue to play an important role and provide a fine career in the foreseeable future?

Mr. King: I certainly confirm my hon. Friend's comments about the quality of the work at Vosper Thornycroft, which is the basis of its competitiveness and why it has achieved the order placed directly by my Department. It confirms our commitment to a substantial number of ships in the future. Hon. Members could easily have been misled by referring to a previous *Hansard* which shows that a substantial number of ships are on order but fails to reflect the Government's commitment to naval shipbuilding. An unfortunate misprint in *Hansard* says that the value of the ships on order is £4·6 million whereas the correct answer should have been £4·6 billion.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): It would be churlish to do anything other than welcome unreservedly the Secretary of State's announcement, and I willingly do so. He will appreciate that there will be not only a sense of relief at Yarrow, but a great sense of pride that the company has been entrusted with that order. The Secretary of State mentioned in his statement the disappointment that others might feel. When will he be in a position to make a firm announcement about the placing of an order for the fourth Trident submarine?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his comments. My announcement is a tribute to the shipyard's competitiveness and productivity. I remember walking round that shipyard some 30 years ago. A transformation has taken place in the productivity of British shipbuilding because of privatisation, because there was no bottomless pit to which shipyards could turn, and because of the sheer reality that none of those yards would exist unless there had been a quantum change in working practices. The competitive procurement policy of the Ministry of Defence has been good news not only for the Ministry and the taxpayer but for the yards. A discussion is currently taking place on the contract for the fourth Trident boat. We intend to proceed and shall resolve the contract at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): It is clearly in the interests of the Royal Navy and of the taxpayer that there should be competitive tendering to obtain the lowest price. Will my right hon. Friend give me a categorical assurance that that order was decided solely on price? Would the cost have been significantly higher if the order had been divided? Finally, is it still the Government's intention to proceed with ordering a large helicopter carrier, known as an aviation support ship? Swan Hunter's experience of shipbuilding for the navy makes it well placed to win a contract.

Mr. King: I can confirm my hon. Friend's first point. Nobody has fought harder than he for the interests of the shipyards of the Tyne and for Swan Hunter. I know that today's announcement will be a disappointment for them, and that those on the Tyne recognise that the response to all that they asked for previously was fair play. Yarrow was a clear winner in the competition. I also confirm that a clear benefit is that of batch ordering. We did not merely see three ships come sailing by: ordering in threes has shown significant benefits and economies. Furthermore, we intend to invite tenders for the building of an aviation support ship shortly. That is of great interest to my hon. Friend and to other hon. Members, and Swan Hunter will clearly be one of the real contenders for that.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): As Yarrow is the flagship in my constituency and the biggest private employer in the whole of Glasgow, I hope that the Secretary of State will accept my sense of relief and—yes —gratitude that the Ministry has made that decision today. I am also grateful for the Secretary of State's confirmation that the order was won on merit and is a testament to the ability and dedication of the management and work force at Yarrow Shipbuilders. When the Secretary of State worked in Glasgow in a previous life, he grew to know the value of the stamp, "Clyde-built". Today's order confirms that.

When is the work likely to start? Notwithstanding the good news, many hundreds of the workers at Yarrow Shipbuilders have already gone down the road and it would be helpful if we could proceed quickly.

I have just one quibble: could we not consider naming the ships HMS Stewart, Lang and Forsyth in memory of three Ministers who, notwithstanding that good news, are likely not to be in office much longer?

Mr. King: I am appalled at the flippant way in which the hon. Member addresses the serious matter of the continuing equipment of the Royal Navy. I can confirm, however, that the company would not have won this order except as a private sector yard which will have to incur the costs if it makes losses. Such losses will be borne, not by the Government, but by the company. I do not think that it is in any way insulting to say that the epithet, "Clyde-built", which was a badge of quality in the last century, was getting somewhat tarnished during the post-war years. The efforts of the management and the work force now in the shipyards on the Clyde and in Yarrow's have done a great deal to restore that badge of quality, which was in danger of slipping away.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that this is wonderful news for Glasgow and for Scotland and a great tribute to the work force and management, some of whom were in the House this week to meet an all-party group? As we have had some rather rough news in the past few weeks, it is a real shot in the arm and the country will be grateful for the announcement.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and he is right to recognise the importance of the announcement. He is right also to say that the value is not just for Yarrow. Hundreds of subcontractors, in Scotland as in other parts of the country, will benefit from this announcement. My hon. Friend will also know the value of the more competitive and effective approach of the yard. It is currently in the final stages of negotiations for a very important order from Malaysia which, had it not been the competitive and effective yard that it now is, it would have had no chance of getting.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Secretary of State said that he was mindful of the atmosphere in yards which had competed and failed. Will he share with the House his thoughts about the atmosphere that he thinks will now prevail in Cammell Laird, which finds itself unable to compete for naval orders? Is he aware that, under British Shipbuilders, Laird's was classified as a naval yard, and other yards not so classified were given intervention funding? Laird's now has to go into battle without any chance of getting either naval orders or intervention funds. Does the Secretary of State believe that the action of the board of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. in disqualifying us from competing for this work is fair to Cammell Laird? What does he think that that does for the Government's competition policy?

Mr. King: I understand very well the point that the hon. Member raises, having worn another hat previously when a major shipyard was one of my biggest concerns. The question whether one had a naval involvement or access to the intervention fund was very critical indeed. That yard, privatised and sold to a new owner and with access to the intervention fund, now has a substantial number of new orders. I would rather not answer across the Floor of the House the serious point that the hon. Member has raised, but I will certainly look into it and come back to him.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): While the Secretary of State's announcement is good news for Yarrow and the Clyde, it is none the less a disappointment for the other three shipyards that submitted tenders, not least VSEL in Barrow, although the order for the 4·5 inch gun would be welcome.

The Secretary of State referred to Trident. To pursue the question put by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), the Secretary of State will be aware that the long lead orders for the four Trident submarines were placed some time ago and that construction is quite well advanced. Is he able to elaborate on the answer that he gave to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East? Can he say how evaluation of the tender is progressing? I understand that progress is good. Can he give some sort of time scale, given good will on both sides, and when the order may be expected to be placed?

Mr. King: I obviously understand the disappointment. There is no question but that VSEL strived genuinely to compete for the order, and put in an effective bid. Unfortunately, from the company's point of view, it was not so competitive as that from Yarrow, but it was certainly a very responsible offer. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the outstandingly successful 4·5 inch gun produced by VSEL is a source of further valuable orders for it.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, the construction of the 08, the fourth boat, is currently under way and authorities have been given for the long lead items. The contract is being evaluated. The House will understand that, although we prefer these matters to be resolved by competitive tendering, in this case we are effectively talking about a single supplier, so it is vital to get the contract right. That is why we must ensure that the contract is properly dealt with—otherwise, the Public Accounts Committee, among other bodies, will have a lot to say. We must deal with the matter carefully. I am anxious that the question should be resolved as soon as possible. Although I cannot give a date, we intend to proceed just as soon as we can resolve the question of the contract.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): As a Glasgow Member, I add my own expression of delight and relief, and I congratulate the Yarrow management and work force. They certainly deserve their success. Anyone who has spoken to them recently knows of the problems with which they have had to cope. May I add one small point? I was surprised to hear the proposed names for the three frigates. As the memory of the clearances lingers in Scotland, I suggest that the Duke of Sutherland is perhaps not the most popular name that could have been chosen.

Mr. King: Given that the announcement is outstandingly good news for the hon. Lady and her constituents, it is unfortunate that she should wish to introduce a divisive note.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I congratulate Yarrow on its good fortune in securing a contract for three ships at once, but I must express some dismay on behalf of Vosper Thornycroft, Southampton, which has built many naval ships in the past.

[Mr. James Hill]

I have a query about the fibreglass minesweepers. I understand that my right hon. Friend has just been to Oman, so perhaps he can give the House some information. Vosper Thornycroft, Southampton, is anxiously waiting for confirmation of the order from the Sheik of Oman for a fleet of minesweepers.

Mr. King: I confirm that I returned from the Gulf late last night. I spent some time in discussion in Oman, not about the minesweepers but about the much more valuable corvette order that the Omanis are seeking to place, and I was given very satisfactory assurances by His Majesty the Sultan about those orders. Details remain to be resolved and I hope that it will be possible to resolve them quickly.

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): When the Secretary of State listed the areas that would benefit from today's announcement, he made no mention of Tyneside. He has now ordered 13 type 23 frigates, four of which either were or are under construction at Swan Hunter on Tyneside. I understand that type 23 frigates are grouped in fours around the fleet auxiliaries. AOR1 is the first auxiliary oil replenishment vessel and AOR2 is currently being constructed on Tyneside. As the Secretary of State has now ordered 13 type 23 frigates and has only two AOR vessels, does he not need to order another AOR vessel? When will he make an announcement about AOR3?

Mr. King: I do not have any comment to make on that ship at the moment, but the hon. Gentleman will have heard what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) about the aviation support ship, for which Swan's is obviously one of the real contenders. That could be an important ship for Swan's. I took the trouble to look at what the hon. Gentleman said last time, when Swan's was successful. He said magnanimously, "All that we ever ask for is fair play." I can assure him that fair play is what he has got in this case. I am sorry that he is disappointed that the order did not go to Swan's, but I can assure him that there was fair play and it has gone to Yarrow.

Mr. John Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the order and the announcement will be widely welcomed, particularly by the work force and managment of GEC, Rugby? It is good news for jobs and it is good news for the town. Can my right hon. Friend say what is the global worth of the contract, and does he agree that it represents a vote of confidence in British engineering?

Mr. King: I can confirm that. This statement differs from previous statements in that it spells out the main contractors. There is a tendency for people to approach this matter as though it were one entirely for the shipyard concerned. In fact, the larger part of the value of the contract is not in the hull itself but in the components, a significant proportion of which will be provided by GEC in Rugby. Obviously, for commercial reasons, I cannot disclose individual contract values. However, I can confirm that the overall value of the ships with equipment that I have announced today approaches £400 million.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that his Department takes an adequate interest in the subcontracts? Is he aware that the chain and cable industry in this country is widely accepted as being the best in the world in terms of both technology and workmanship? Will he ensure that it is not unfairly excluded as a result of the foreign dumping of inferior chain?

Mr. King: I am interested to hear that, and I will certainly look into it.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): My right hon. Friend will be aware that HMS Norfolk—the first of the Duke class—has been accepted into the fleet and has been completing work-up at Portland. Past colleagues of mine who are still serving in the Royal Navy tell me that she is an outstanding success and a tribute to British shipbuilding. Indeed, she is a foretaste of what we shall be getting in these other ships. Is my right hon. Friend aware that his announcement about vertically launched Sea Wolf will be most welcome to British Aerospace in Bristol? I know that in this regard my feeling will be echoed by my hon. Friends with responsibility for Bristol constituencies. It is regrettable that, yet again, the Labour Member for Bristol has not bothered to turn up.

Mr. King: I did notice the absence. I know that my hon. Friend, who takes a close interest in these matters, understands the importance to Bristol and to British Aerospace of this decision and this order. Bearing in mind his experience and his information, I am pleased to hear his tribute to the quality of HMS Norfolk—as it happens, the first of class, built at Yarrow. The news that my hon. Friend has given the House is encouraging.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that this news is very welcome indeed? It is a tribute not only to the management at Yarrow but to the workers, who have spent a long time removing ill-considered demarcation practices—and it is as a shipbuilder that I say that. Will the Secretary of State concede that one of the things that this will enable Yarrow to do is to keep its essential design capability, illustrated by the fact that it produced the first of class? Will he continue to allow it flexibility in respect of other markets?

Mr. King: I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I have to make the point that it will not be possible to keep any design capability, any warship-building capability or any manufacturing capability for the sort of defence components that we need unless the Government are prepared to fund the defence programme at a sensible level. While I am far too gentle and decent a person to criticise any Opposition Member who has joined in the expressions of appreciation of this action, I have to say, in the kindest possible way, that if the defence policies to which the Opposition subscribe—I include all the Opposition parties—were implemented, we should not be ordering a rowing boat, let alone three frigates.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's statement because it demonstrates the Government's commitment to a better equipped fleet for the future, even though the fleet manpower is contracting, and because jobs will be provided in the Portsmouth travel-to-work area. Many people wish to write down the opportunities which exist, but under the present Government there is a future for many of the defence-related industries in my area.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who, I know, appreciates the situation very well. We have announced changes, including some reductions in numbers. It is true that the new type 23s, because of their greater capability and efficiency, will operate with smaller crews. They show very clearly that the Government are ensuring that, while we may reduce the personnel numbers in our armed forces, we are increasing the relative proportion of funds spent on their equipment to ensure that in the future they have the equipment that they need to perform the tasks that we set them.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I join the whole House in paying tribute to the work force and management at Yarrow on winning this vital order against such stiff competition. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the competition was won on price? And can he reveal whether the tendering process says anything about the level of profits being made by VSEL in the manufacturing and construction of Trident submarines?

Mr. King: No, I cannot comment on that, but it is relevant to the contract negotiations for Trident 08—we must protect the public Exchequer precisely from the problem of a monopoly single buyer.

I can certainly confirm that the contract was placed on merit; it was won by a clear margin in a competitive tender.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is good news for the Ansty Rolls-Royce plant in my constituency which manufactures Spey engines? This is welcome news for the employees and management of that company. Will he also accept that his demonstration of confidence in the plant's high quality power unit is most important for the company when it seeks orders abroad?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is certainly true that the Spey engines have proved an outstanding success. The Royal Navy has great confidence in them and they were chosen for their quality, flexibility and efficiency. They have stood the Royal Navy in good stead. It is because of our defence programme's ability to maintain an effective ordering programme that we can also attract interest among overseas countries. What we invest in is always of great interest to such countries. They know that if an item has the Royal Navy's endorsement it is bound to be of good quality.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will certainly look with compassion in days to come on the three hon. Members whom I have not been able to call on the statement, but we have a busy day ahead of us.

Points of Order

4.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier, the House heard the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) make wholly untrue allegations about Labour's policies with respect to the savings and income from savings of pensioners. We have come to expect the premeditated dishonesty of Conservative Central Office to be reprinted in the *Daily Mail*, but we do not intend to allow it to go unchallenged in the columns of *Hansard*. The hon. Gentleman should withdraw his allegation.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot be expected to monitor these statements. I am not a member of the Conservative party, so I do not receive this literature.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Shortly before yesterday's debate on the economy you told the House that in your opinion the general election campaign started when we came back from the Christmas recess. Of course, in these difficult circumstances you seek to keep order, but I ask you to reflect on one problem and to see what you can do about it. I refer to what I regard as the Labour party's organised disruption of yesterday's debate.

The example that I wish to mention is drawn not only from the delayed start of the debate but from the organised barracking of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury orchestrated from the Back Benches by a Labour Whip. So now we know that a member of the Labour party Whips Office was organising the disruption.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member, and others, do not receive letters about this from the general public, but I do. When I have to answer them I have some difficulty defending Members of the House, for whom I have a high regard and affection, if they behave badly, but such bad behaviour does not always come from the same side of the House.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: This all takes up a lot of time; we are under great pressure today.

Mr. Ewing: I am delighted to learn that you are a floating voter, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Labour party, I invite you to join the vast majority of people in this country at the next election and to vote Labour.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): On a slightly more serious point of order, Mr. Speaker. You were right to point out that from now until polling day, whenever it may be, will be somewhat tortuous not just for the watching public but for Members who sit in this Chamber. You will no doubt be concerned for the reputation of this House. As we may have to wait even until the summer, tempers may get a little tetchy, as last night's closing session proved. Would it be worth your while to consider sending for the chairman not only of the 1922 committee but also of the parliamentary Labour party so that the leaders of the respective parties in Parliament can discuss with you the conduct last night? The Chief Secretary was undoubtedly unable to explain his case fully because of the obviously organised baiting. That does not augur well for the reputation of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that it is necessary for me to send for the chairmen of Back-Bench committees. The behaviour of the House is in the hands of hon. Members themselves. They surely do not need to be told by the chairmen of the respective parliamentary committees what they should and should not do. I ask the hon. Member to reflect on what he has said.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have a suggestion.

Mr. Speaker: Yes?

Mr. Winnick: You said that you receive letters of complaint from the general public. May I help you by suggesting that if you could persuade the Prime Minister to fix the election date now there would be no need for this pre-election period—if the Prime Minister would stop shilly-shallying because he is afraid of going to the country.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): On a very brief point of order, Mr. Speaker. A few minutes ago the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) attacked my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) for being absent from the Chamber for the statement. I do not know why my hon. Friend is not here today, but I know that she is a very hard-working, committed hon. Member. For whatever reason, she is not here; I am sure that she is doing something important.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that in this period of electioneering excitement we can keep off the personalities and concentrate on the policies.

In relation to what the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said about the letters that I receive, very few of them to date, particularly since we have been televised, have been about bad behaviour in the House—rather the reverse—and I wish it to remain that way.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Because the hon. Member was not called earlier, I will allow the point of order.

Dr. Godman: With unfailing respect, may I ask why I was not called on the Yarrow statement? I have not spoken in this place for a considerable period of time.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that I should explain to the hon. Member why he was not called. I have to have a balance of Glasgow Members and other hon. Members —[HON. MEMBERS: "Clyde Members."]—well, Clydeside Members, then, against some other hon. Member who did not hear such good news as the hon. Member has had. I thought that because he had had such good news he might just like to keep it to himself today.

BILL PRESENTED

SOCIAL SECURITY (MORTGAGE INTEREST PAYMENTS)

Mr. Secretary Newton, supported by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Heseltine, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Mr. Secretary Lang, Mr. Nicholas Scott and Miss Ann Widdecombe, presented a Bill to make provision for requiring, in certain cases where interest on a loan secured on land is payable by a person who is entitled, or whose partner, former partner or qualifying associate is entitled, to income support, the applicable amount in respect of which includes a sum in respect of that interest, that a part of the benefits to which any of those persons is entitled under the enactments relating to social security shall be paid directly to the lender and applied towards the discharge of the liability in respect of the interest; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 57.]

Opposition Day

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

Poverty

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, a very large number of hon. Members are seeking to participate in the debate. It would be possible for me to call them all if they were to limit their speeches to 10 minutes. I have no authority to do that in a half-day debate, but perhaps hon. Members will bear it in mind. If I may say to those on the Front Benches too, half-hour speeches would help the whole House.

4.37 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, noting that the ten million people today living on or below the income support level of less than £40 a week for an adult represent the greatest numbers in poverty in Britain since the war, and that the Government has as a deliberate policy over twelve years further impoverished the poorest one third of the nation to make the rich richer, calls on the Government to reverse its policies of increasing poverty and unemployment and to give priority to the growing millions excluded from the rights and opportunities of real citizenship by increasing pensions by £5 per week for a single pensioner and by £8 a week for a married couple, by re-instituting the pension link with earnings which the Government broke twelve years ago, and by restoring to families the losses in child benefit from three years of government freeze.

There could be no clearer indicator of the indifference and contempt in which the Government hold those on the lowest incomes than the Government's exclusive concern with our tax proposals, without even a glimmer of a mention of those who will benefit from them. There could be no more revealing insight into the Government's priorities than their obsessive concentration on the 8·7 per cent. richest taxpayers whom the independent Institute of Fiscal Studies estimated would lose under our proposals while at the same time completely ignoring the 46 per cent. of the population who, the same institute calculated, would gain under our proposals.

We should not, however, be surprised. This is the Government who have stopped pensioners getting an annual increase in line with Community living standards, a deliberate act of policy in 1980, which cumulatively so far —according to a parliamentary answer to me on 25 November last—has removed from pensioners £31·8 billion of improved pensions which they would otherwise have had.

The Government have cut unemployment benefit 11 times since 1979, making a cumulative "saving"—if I may use that word—at the expense of the unemployed, of £5 billion to £6 billion over the past decade. They have repeatedly cut benefits for the disabled by abolishing industrial injury benefit, by abolishing disablement benefit for seven out of eight disabled people and by abolishing the reduced earnings allowance for disabled people who cannot earn a full wage. They have frozen child benefit for three years so that mothers and families are nearly £1 billion worse off than they would otherwise have been.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): About 18 months ago, the hon. Gentleman said that he

had irrefutable evidence that the Government intended to abolish child benefit. After three increases, where is his evidence? Has he lost it, or did he make it up?

Mr. Meacher: I did not say that I had irrefutable evidence. I certainly regarded the continuance of child benefit as very uncertain, and I still regard it as uncertain. If by some mischance the Government are returned for a fourth term, I should be surprised if child benefit survives to the end of their term.

With a record like that, no wonder Ministers want to keep the spotlight on the tax and national insurance costs of our proposals and away from the half of the nation who will gain. For that half of the nation, the Government have been the meanest, the most divisive and the most vindictive Government in modern times. It is all too clear why there has been such an unremitting broadside from Ministers against our tax and national insurance proposals. It is partly because they are desperate to divert attention from the recession—which they created, from which they cannot escape and which will lose them the election—and partly because they are desperate to conceal the enormity of what they have done in wilfully impoverishing the poorer half of the nation.

By contrast, I make it clear that Labour believes it is right and just and should be the first priority for pensioners to get an increase of £5 a week for a single pensioner and £8 a week for a married couple, given the mean and miserable way in which they have been treated over the past decade. We shall make no corresponding deductions from income support, housing benefit or poll tax benefit, which means that the poorest pensioners will gain the full £5 and £8 a week.

It is also right and just that mothers and children should be compensated for three years of Tory freeze by getting an increase in child benefit of more than £2 a week for second and subsequent children. We have been honest in making it clear that the extra cost of that will be confined to the richest 10 per cent. of taxpayers. It is fair that those on £70,000 a year should contribute. According to a parliamentary answer on 6 March last year, those people have gained an extra £700 a week in real terms from tax cuts in successive Budgets since 1979.

It is also fair that those on £60,000 a year who have gained an extra £192, those on £50,000 a year—a group which includes several Ministers—who have gained an extra £131 a week and those on £40,000 who have gained an extra £77 a week should also contribute. A small contribution should also be made by those on £30,000 a year who have gained an extra £45 a week. I make it clear that no contribution will be sought from anyone earning less than £21,000 a year, or £405 a week. We intend to take back a small fraction of the large windfall tax gains received by the 10 per cent. richest taxpayers over the past decade so that we may restore to nearly half the population a modest part of the cuts imposed by the Government on all the poorest groups in the country. We think that that is fair and we believe that the country will think it fair.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): How can the hon. Gentleman explain the guarantee that he gave in the last few sentences, bearing in mind that national insurance contributions are levied weekly, not annually, and would be levied on anyone whose income, because of bonuses, overtime, commission and so on in any one week, went above the rate representing the annual level?

Mr. Meacher: That issue has been raised during the past couple of weeks. It ill-behoves the Government to raise the issue of a few dozen, perhaps a few hundred, people who on one or two weeks of the year suddenly get a substantial increase in pay, given that the Government have doubled VAT even though they said they would never do that.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman's answer is that what he has said is not a guarantee.

Mr. Meacher: It is a guarantee that all those whose normal pay is at that level will not have to pay more. To speak about tiny discrepancies is an insult to the people when the Government have increased taxation from 34 to 37 per cent. for the average person.

I have spelt out our position and shall now look briefly at that of the Government. By breaking the pension link with earnings, the Secretary of State for Social Security and his predecessors have made the single pensioner about £14 a week worse off and the married couple £23 a week worse off than they would have been under the policies that existed in 1979. Having done that to the pensioners, the right hon. Gentleman proposes to continue to reduce even further their share of average living standards year by year.

It is not that the Secretary of State and the Government do not have a choice. There is persistent talk of 1p off income tax in the Budget, or perhaps an increase in personal allowances by double the rate of inflation. Clearly, there is leeway of about £2 billion in the Budget. That is enough to increase the pension for a single person by about £3·50 a week and for a married couple by about £5·50 a week, together with all the linked benefits. Why is not the right hon. Gentleman demanding that his colleagues should help the pensioners for once? Why is he such a pushover when it comes to defending the 17 million people who depend on benefits? The Secretary of State is silent. We have grown used to his silences, which sometimes last for months on end. They speak volumes. Even after slapping pensioners round the face year after year throughout the past decade, the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, even at this time, prefer tax cuts for their friends in the upper income groups rather than the tiniest measure of justice for pensioners.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has a relevant comment.

Mr. Burns: Between the hon. Gentleman's flights of hyperbole, which make him sound more and more like a cold war warrior when the cold war has ended, will he remind the House that between 1979 and 1988 pensioners' incomes rose by 33 per cent. in real terms above inflation?

Mr. Meacher: I shall be glad to put it on record, and perhaps the hon. Gentleman will take note of it, that the 2 million poorest pensioners, who do not have any other income, have had an increase in pension in real terms since 1979 of between 0 per cent. and 2 per cent. Under the last Labour Government, who were in office for five years, the increase was 20 per cent. The hon. Gentleman referred to a 33 per cent. increase. There is one major reason for that

[Mr. Meacher]

—the state-earnings related pension scheme which Labour introduced. In 1979 it was worth about 50p a week. For the average pensioner retiring this year on average earnings it is worth £40·80 per week. Pensioners have done better because of Labour's action on pensions, which the Secretary of State's predecessor tried to abolish.

What is the Prime Minister's position? He likes to proclaim the classless society—I think that he describes it as a nation at ease with itself—yet he has produced the most class-divided society since the war, a nation more riven by depression, anxiety and fear than at any time for a decade. It gives me no pride to say that for the first time since the war more than 10 million people, or more than one in six of the population, are living at or below the income support level. That is more even than when unemployment was last at its peak in 1986.

While the Prime Minister in his so-called classless society always travels first class, the 10 million at the bottom are deprived even—if I may coin a phrase—of the "cheap and cheerful" class. Not only are there more of them than before, but the poverty level standard on which they are forced to live is at a record low. It is less than £40 a week for an adult over 25. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman, who gets more than £1,000 a week, should try living on £40 for a week. If Ministers had to experience that in practice, it would not stay at that level for long.

Faced with those figures by David Frost last Sunday, what was the Prime Minister's response? It was to wriggle and to fiddle. He said:

> "Now we have raised those income support levels far above the amount that one would need to raise them simply to keep pace with inflation, so in essence we have brought into the statistics people who otherwise would have been beyond those statistics. So there is an artificiality in the figures."

I have news for the Prime Minister. The only artificiality in the official figures is that they are lower than the reality because every year for the last eight years the Government have cut income support and supplementary benefit in relation to average earnings.

Since 1979, the Government have cut the relative value of the benefits by a quarter. That really matters when a person receives less than £40 a week. Because those on income support have now been deprived of single payments and have to pay 100 per cent. water rates and 20 per cent. poll tax, income support has not even kept up with inflation. If the Prime Minister would put only half the ingenuity that he devotes to misrepresenting the truth into dealing with the problem, we might make progress in reducing the poverty which he has played such a big part in creating.

The Prime Minister has a record as long as one's arm. He tells us about his humble origins about as often as the Chancellor tells us that the recession is ending. But that did not stop him—when he had the power as a Minister at the Department of Social Security—cutting in half the relief on mortgage interest payments for the first 16 weeks for newly unemployed, or virtually abolishing disability benefit, sharply cutting the number of free school meals, or punitively extending the unemployment benefit disqualification rules from 16 to 26 weeks and setting up the hated social fund; I might add to that his refusal now of 75 per cent. of the applications made under it.

This is the same man who in 1988, together with his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, chopped £1 billion off the benefits for people on £40 a week, at the same time as the Chancellor handed £2 billion in tax cuts to higher rate taxpayers. Surely there cannot be a clearer demonstration of Tory contempt for those struggling on the lowest incomes.

Perhaps, if the Prime Minister were here, he would say that as a junior Minister he was acting under orders. I understand that point. In that case, why has he done nothing, since becoming Prime Minister, to reverse the harsh legislation for which he was responsible? Why has he not even revoked the iniquitous 16-week mortgage interest disqualification rule which he personally introduced in the House in December 1986 and which, of course, is the root cause of thousands of repossessions?

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Absolute nonsense.

Mr. Meacher: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman, who before the debate started was making a bogus point of order about disrupting proceedings, speaks to some of those whose houses have been repossessed about the effect that that has had on them.

Why has the Prime Minister left in place a Chancellor who has shown his personal contempt for the poor by saying that unemployment is a price well worth paying? Why has he done nothing to halt the human tide of despair among the 1 million people forced on to income support —not when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister, but since he became Prime Minister? The Prime Minister inherited a wilderness and he has simply presided over its getting worse. He spends more time running away from elections than facing up to fundamental issues.

Our social security system is probably the worst in the EC, with the possible exception of those in Greece, Spain and Portugal. It is getting steadily worse by the year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] It is not rubbish; it is a fact. If hon. Members looked at the figures of comparative benefit, they would understand the point which I am making.

British pensions, British child benefit and British disability benefits are all lower, and in many cases substantially lower, than those of all our main competitors. We have a Secretary of State for Social Security who is distinguished only by his invisibility, and who has done nothing to arrest the steady disintegration of the benefits system, the growing demoralisation of his staff in social security offices and the major dissatisfaction and anger of so many clients.

At least I was assured that the right hon. Gentleman still existed when, a week ago, he issued a press release attacking the Labour party over its national insurance plans. The only problem was that he contradicted the figures which he had given only a month ago by exaggerating them by no less than 50 per cent. Perhaps he should return to his hibernation.

We have a Government where the last resort of the scoundrel is to lie.

Mr. Arbuthnot *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I am not giving way again. Other hon. Members wish to speak. The hon. Gentleman can make his own speech.

We have a Government who are making wild and unthruthful allegations against us about tax as they have no other resort left. Let us consider briefly their record on

tax. Under the Tories, taxation has gone up from 34 per cent. to 37 per cent. Theirs is not a tax-cutting party but a tax-raising party. The Government say that they will cut income tax and increase public expenditure. That means that they will have to put up VAT which, as the latest edition of "Social Trends" out yesterday shows, hits poorer families much harder than richer families. Of course, the Tories say that they have no plans to increase VAT. They said that in 1978 and in 1987. On both occasions, they promptly increased it directly after the elections. We cannot trust the Tories on VAT. It was the Tories who introduced VAT; it was the Tories who doubled it. Labour cut it from 10 per cent. to 8 per cent. in 1974.

The Labour party believes in fair taxation, justice and the right of participation for all our citizens, including the poorest. Because the Tories have shown by their record that they manifestly believe in neither, the issue which we are debating today will play a major part in removing them soon from power.

4.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

'warmly endorses the Government's policies for focusing considerable extra help on the most vulnerable in society; welcomes the further real increases in benefits shortly to take place for many older less well off pensioners and hundreds of thousands of disabled people; notes the Social Security Select Committee's conclusion that real disposable incomes grew by 30 per cent. between 1979 and 1988 with increases in real income being seen at all levels of the income scale; believes that policies which provide more choice and greater opportunities are the best way of helping people to create a better life for themselves and their families; and recognises that, if implemented, Her Majesty's Opposition's confused tax and spending plans would impoverish the whole nation, increase unemployment and destroy opportunities.'.

In the light of one or two observations that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I shall begin with an observation that I had not intended to make: that I have not the slightest doubt that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister would not make the remark about orders that the hon. Member for Oldham, West suggested. What I do know is that, when challenged on his record when he was a Social Security Minister, the hon. Gentleman was heard to mutter that of course he was a junior Minister and had to do what he was told.

Mr. Meacher: Since the right hon. Gentleman has made that allegation, I totally and absolutely refute it and ask him to provide the evidence, or else to withdraw it.

Mr. Newton: I heard the hon. Gentleman mutter that when I made the point across the Dispatch Box in the last debate that we had on this subject. If the hon. Gentleman assures me that my recollection or my hearing was wrong, then of course I accept that unequivocally. I simply say that he had no business to make that suggestion about the Prime Minister. I remind him that he was a Minister in the old Department of Health and Social Security when the Christmas bonus was not paid for two years running—so much for his concern for the pensioners—and when Labour failed to carry out its own obligation——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. There is too much body language.

Mr. Newton: —in respect of the uprating of benefits.

The hon. Gentleman's approach to these matters can best be illustrated by looking at a number of his recent texts. When I saw the figure of 10 million people living in poverty in the motion that he tabled, I found that I could not reconcile it with a number of other figures that the hon. Gentleman had used. I did some research and found that in "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change: A new Agenda for Britain" of June 1989 we were told that the numbers living in poverty had grown from 11 million to over 15 million. Later, in September 1991, we were told that over 11 people were living in poverty. When the hon. Gentleman wrote to the Prime Minister in November 1991 the figure had come down to just over 9·5 million. In a press release that he issued on 17 December, less than a month later, the figure rose again to nearly 15 million. Today it has come down to 10 million.

It is tempting for me to draw from that wild variation the conclusion that, on Labour's own figures, the Government have reduced poverty by a third in a month. I shall refrain from doing so, however, and will simply wonder—no doubt in common with several of his right hon. and hon. Friends—just what it is that the hon. Gentleman thinks he is doing.

Mr. Meacher: If one takes account of the extra passported benefits associated with income support, one comes to a substantially higher figure than if one simply counts the heads of household claiming income support. If one takes into account only heads of household, which is what I did, the number stands at over 8·3 million. If one then takes into account what the National Audit Office said in its House of Commons paper 451—that 1·8 million who are living below the threshold are not claiming income support—one finds that the figure comes to just over 10 million. That is a shocking figure. It is the highest figure that we have ever had.

Mr. Newton: It is lower than the figure that the document I first quoted gave for 1979, which was 11 million. The hon. Gentleman appears to use whatever figures he thinks will have most impact in whatever press release he decides to issue in a particular week. Only one thing is absolutely clear: that, whatever else these figures do, they do not provide a sensible measure of poverty. They are constructed, apparently, in two different ways, both of which lead the hon. Gentleman, in the conclusions that he then seeks to draw, into manifest and palpable absurdity.

The first of these methods, upon which the hon. Gentleman touched earlier, is to take as the number in poverty the number of people at or below the income support rate and, as he said, sometimes to add in those who are a little above it. I leave aside the fact that the last Labour Government—I believe at the time when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister—declined to accept that sort of definition of a poverty line, just as much as the present Government have declined to accept it. I would simply make the point that, according to this "Alice in Wonderland" approach to measuring poverty, every real increase in the income support rates, which by definition makes people better off, produces in the hon. Gentleman's world an increase in the amount of poverty.

In April, when the 7 per cent. rise in income support generally and the further real increase in the higher pensioners' premium will give new income support

[Mr. Newton]

entitlement to about 500,000 people, most of them pensioners, making them better off, the hon. Gentleman will presumably be running round the country saying that poverty has increased from 10 million to 10·5 million. Incidentally, the converse is true—that a reduction in income support rates, which makes all those involved worse off, would show up in his kind of figuring as a reduction in poverty. It is utterly and totally ridiculous.

If anything, it gets worse. The second of the hon. Gentleman's methods for measuring what he calls poverty —I suspect that this is the real reason for some of the confused figures to which I referred a few moments ago —is to make reference to average incomes and then to say that everybody with less than half the average is to be designated a pauper.

The result, especially when average incomes are rising, as they have been under this Government, is once again to pretend that people who are getting better off are becoming poor, simply because the increase in their incomes is less than the average. Once again it is absurd, although here, too, there is an obvious converse: that we could make everyone in the country worse off, and, so long as we reduced the average by hitting the better-off hardest, a lot of people further down the scale would allegedly cease to be poor, even as their incomes fell.

One can see the relevance of that. This is a very attractive proposition for a Labour Government. At one and the same time, they could reduce the standard of living of everybody in the country and claim that they were reducing poverty. No doubt that is what the hon. Gentleman has in mind. There could be no clearer indication from the way in which the hon. Gentleman uses these figures that what he is really talking about—and, frankly, what he is really interested in—is not poverty but equality, an entirely separate matter.

So much for the hon. Gentleman's figures. I am interested in helping people to become better off. Therefore, I prefer to rest on the simple, clear and accurate conclusion of the Social Security Select Committee in its report on low-income statistics. I am happy to see that its Chairman, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), is in the Chamber today. The report said:

"Real disposable incomes grew by more than 30 per cent. between 1979 and 1988, with increases in real income being seen at all levels of the income scale."

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Will the right hon. Gentleman also quote the distribution figures for those at the bottom, those on average and those on higher incomes, which may be disguised by just putting across that average figure?

Mr. Newton: I implied that there have been changes in the distribution of income and the speed with which incomes have changed. That is not the same as the systematic attempt by the hon. Member for Oldham, West to pretend that large numbers of people have been getting better off, which the Select Committee rightly refuted.

Mr. Field: Will the right hon. Gentleman now say that he endorses the finding of the Select Committee that those who gained the smallest increase under this Government's stewardship were the poorest?

Mr. Newton: What I shall certainly endorse is that, in recent years, and certainly in the period since I have been Secretary of State, we have steadily—uprating by uprating —steered additional resources to poorer pensions and to others whom we had identified, as a result of our research, as among those who were not doing as well as we should have wished.

Mr. Field: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, but may I ask him that question again? He has quoted the Select Committee report. Does he endorse the whole of that report, which shows that the very poorest have gained the smallest increase under this Government?

Mr. Newton: I accept that there are variations in the way in which incomes have grown—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."]—at different levels of the income distribution. I am going no further than that—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] —because, apart from anything else, the hon. Member for Birkenhead, to whom I give credit for taking a genuine and serious interest in such matters——

Mr. Field: Don't we all?

Mr. Newton: He will recognise that, apart from anything else, the composition of different deciles and quartiles in those distribution figures is not necessarily the same at the end of the period as it was at the beginning. A whole range of extremely complicated factors are involved. If the hon. Gentleman will accept that, I shall move on.

Mr. Field: I accept that fully, but some of those in the lowest decile remained in the lowest decile throughout the Government's entire period in office. Will the right hon. Gentleman now come to the Dispatch Box to say that, under the stewardship of this Government, the poorest people in this country have had the smallest increase?

Mr. Newton: I do not think that there is any basis in the hon. Gentleman's report for that suggestion— *[Interruption.]* What I am saying—I think that he will accept this, because his own report makes the point—is that, at all levels of the income distribution, people have been getting better off during the lifetime of this Government.

Mr. Meacher: The Select Committee has, of course, produced its own account, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one of his written answers last July showed that, after housing costs, all those in the bottom 10 per cent. of the income distribution—the poorest tenth —were worse off by an average of 6 per cent., and that, according to the Government's own figures, those in the lowest percentile—more than half a million people—were worse off by more than 22 per cent.?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman is taking us into an area which, as I think he knows, is the point at which the Select Committee and, perhaps even more importantly, the Institute of Fiscal Studies has accepted that the samples from which those figures are drawn do not allow that sort of conclusion to be drawn with the certainty with which the hon. Gentleman is pretending that it can.

In addition—this is the point that the hon. Gentleman so often misses when talking about benefit rates— calculations that consider people's incomes after housing costs are artificial when compared with the way in which almost everybody regards their income. Furthermore, when he talks about people living on £40 a week, he is entirely overlooking the fact that, if they are householders, their housing costs will be met 100 per cent. either through

rent or through the payment of their mortgage interest. When compared with the rest of the population, we are talking about significantly greater sums being represented by the benefit rates, as the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well.

I prefer also to look at the clear practical evidence of the improvement that has been taking place for the groups that all hon. Members would regard as the people we particularly wish to help—the pensioners, disabled people and low-income families with children. An important point has already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns)—

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar) *rose*——

Mr. Newton: No, in deference to what Mr. Speaker said earlier, I shall not give way again, because I wish to make progress.

Pensioners' average net incomes grew by more than a third between 1979 and 1988. That income growth is certainly not less than was enjoyed by the rest of the population: indeed, it is probably marginally greater. Furthermore, it is not wholly or largely because of the state earnings-related pension scheme; it is due even more to the growth in savings incomes, which have more than doubled during the lifetime of this Government, but which fell in real terms under the last Labour Government. That increase in pensioners' average net incomes is also due to the increase in incomes from occupational pensions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: What does my right hon. Friend think would happen to the savings income if a massive tax were imposed on it, as has been suggested by the Labour party?

Mr. Newton: The most notable massive tax that Labour Governments have traditionally imposed on savings incomes is the one that caused the problems under the last Labour Government and led to a fall in the real value of savings incomes. It is the tax that is imposed by the rampant inflation with which Labour Governments have always been associated.

I turn now to disabled people. The hon. Member for Oldham, West made some narrow references to the industrial injuries scheme, which is a very limited part of the benefits for disabled people. When the hon. Gentleman studies what he actually said—I am not sure whether it was what he meant—I am sure that he will agree that his remarks were totally and utterly misleading.

The fact is that expenditure on benefits for disabled people has increased by more than 150 per cent. in real terms under the present Government. The number of people receiving mobility allowance has risen from fewer than 100,000 to more than 600,000. The number of people receiving attendance allowance has risen from about 250,000 to well over 750,000. In addition, the number of people receiving invalid care allowance has risen from 5,000 to 150,000—[HON. MEMBERS: "Those are just numbers."] It is all very well to say that those are just numbers but, as I said at the outset, I am interested in trying to help people who need help to be better off.

Even allowing for a measure of overlap of people receiving both attendance allowance and mobility allowance, in my judgment there is no way in which those figures could mean less than the fact that 1 million disabled people, who were not getting those benefits when the present Government took office, now have a significantly higher standard of living as a result of what has transpired while this Government have been in office.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): How can the Secretary of State say that he is interested in helping people when his Government have increased VAT from 8 per cent. to 17·5 per cent. while they have been in office? What has been the effect of that? Will he tell us the real problems that that increase and imposition have presented to elderly and sick people? Tell us its impact on people in poverty.

Mr. Newton: The rates of taxation—whether indirect or direct—are taken into account when calculating the figures about which I had exchanges with the hon. Member for Birkenhead a few moments ago. The plain fact remains that the Select Committee concluded that real incomes have been rising right across the income band——

Ms. Gordon *rose*——

Mr. Newton: No, I shall not give way again for a moment.

Apart from what has already been achieved in respect of the incomes of pensioners generally and in terms of directing additional help towards the less-well-off pensioners, which we have been doing consistently now for several years, and quite apart from the consistent improvements in the range and coverage of benefits for disabled people, we are now building on all that with the steps that we took at the time of the uprating in April.

The further real increase in income support premiums for older and more disabled pensioners, the introduction of new disability benefits—I stress that they are new disability benefits—which will give real extra help of at least £11·55 per week to about 300,000 disabled people over and above the numbers that I have given previously for what has happened in the past 10 to 12 years, and the changes in family credit to which, in the interests of keeping my speech brief, I have not referred will all enhance both the opportunities and the incomes of several tens of thousands of low-income families with children.

Even if the allegations that the hon. Member for Oldham, West has made about the scale of poverty could be made to run, and even if his proposed remedies were thought to be the right ones—on at least one occasion his hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead has suggested that he has some doubts about that—the plainly observable fact is that the policies of the hon. Gentleman and his party simply do not add up. A glaring gap in our debate so far has been that the hon. Gentleman has not sought to deal with that point, although this is the second time that it has happened within a year.

Last March, we had the mini-shambles of the so-called "shadow Budget" which, if I remember rightly, did not even mention the so-called "priority" of retirement pensions. It contained what the hon. Gentleman described as a "carefully costed" proposal on child benefit which would have given money to every family except the least well-off—*[Interruption.]*—despite the fact that the document claimed that Labour's plans would give most help to low-income households. Just as that embarrassment might have been thought to be behind them, we have had the macro-shambles of what has happened in the past month.

[Mr. Newton]

First of all, there were the newspaper reports that other members of the shadow Cabinet were deeply frustrated with the way in which, true to form, the hon. Member for Oldham, West hijacked any extra cash that might be squeezed out of the taxpayer—to put it as the press reported it.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Newton: I am not giving way for the moment.

Those newspaper reports left me with a sense of deja vu. They reminded me of a report in *The Guardian* of 19 July 1986 under the heading "Labour clash on Meacher 'shopping list'". It said that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), now the deputy leader of the Labour party, and the hon. Member for Oldham, West were

"in serious dispute last night about election promises on public expenditure".

There were some interesting bits in the report, which could have been re-run by *The Guardian* in the past week or two.

The self-same deputy leader of the Labour party said in the article:

"Committing the party to doing specific things, at a specific cost, at specific times, will not improve our electoral prospects."

The article also said:

"In particular, the failure to spell out in detail new tax and insurance rates for higher earners is thought by Mr. Hattersley and some other colleagues to be a propaganda gift to the Government."

All that I can say is that the attempt to spell them out has been an even bigger propaganda gift to the Government in the past few weeks.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Newton: Then, after that little flurry, we had the leader of the Labour party himself, no less, writing his new year letter to tens of thousands of households—I am not even sure that the figure given was not a million. I have the letter here. In it he promised, as indeed the hon. Member for Oldham, West attempted to do this afternoon:

"anyone earning less than £21,000 annually . . . will not pay a penny extra in income tax or in national insurance".

That is simply not true, and I think that the hon. Member for Oldham, West knows it—and even acknowledged it in his speech. He chose to wave it away by saying that it would be only a few tens or hundreds.

A great many more people than that will pay more. Anyone who receives regular payments for commission or bonuses or who does substantial amounts of overtime will be significantly hit by the plans that the hon. Gentleman espouses and reiterated this afternoon. If he intends to continue espousing those plans, he had better drop that guarantee, because it is simply not true.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On specific costs and promises, I wonder whether the Secretary of State could tell us what are his Government's specific promises—should they ever win the next election—in respect of pensions, child benefit and disability benefits? Is the right hon. Gentleman still holding to the position that those will all be increased in line with inflation?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows that, at this very moment, our commitments are those which we will implement in the April uprating. Of course, our general policies for the future will be set out when the time comes in a manifesto for the electorate. But I can tell the hon. Gentleman now, because we have made it clear on each and every front in recent weeks. We have made it clear that child benefit will be uprated in line with inflation. We have made it clear, despite repeated attempts by the hon. Member for Oldham, West to suggest otherwise, that we remain absolutely committed to the retirement pension and to protecting it against increases in prices. The hon. Gentleman need not doubt our continued commitment to protecting the value of disability benefits such as those I have talked about this afternoon, at a time when, far from cutting support to disabled people, we are extending those benefits.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Secretary of State for giving way again. I am pleased to hear his assurances that increases in all those benefits will be related to the rise in inflation. He will have read the survey published by, not the Labour party—our costings do not have a party political basis, unlike those of the Secretary of State—but Midland Montagu, a respected and one could hardly say pro-Labour organisation. It concluded that, if they were kept, the Secretary of State's promises would cost another £25 billion in public expenditure. How does the right hon. Gentleman intend to pay for it, if he is elected?

Mr. Newton: That is a nonsense point. The Government's commitments on price protection or other uprating conventions for social security benefits are allowed for in the Government's public expenditure plans.

Mr. Allen: What plans?

Mr. Newton: Published, well known, well set out and beautifully presented plans.

The point about the commitments that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend make is that they are over and above the Government's carefully costed commitments. The hon. Gentleman cannot get out of the cost of his proposals unless he is prepared to tell me that he will go back on the commitments that we have made. He will not, will he?

Mr. Allen: I am happy to continue the dialogue with the Secretary of State. The Midland Montagu survey—not a party political survey and not one with which I would necessarily agree in every detail—says that the Secretary of State's proposals, as outlined today, would cost an additional £25 billion. Those are the words of an independent survey. Apparently, the whole Conservative package comes to an extra £35 billion.

Again, these are not statements which go on the hoardings. They are not party political propaganda. They are part of an independent survey. I give the Secretary of State the chance again, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) gave him the chance on four occasions, to answer the question directly—how will a new Conservative Government pay for it?

Mr. Newton: As I have already said, the point is a complete nonsense point. Our commitments are part of carefully costed plans published in the ordinary way. It does not alter the fact that the Opposition's promises would not reduce the commitments that have already been entered into and planned for. The Opposition would pile another £37 billion on top of them.

That point brings me to the dog which astonishingly has not barked during the debate. It is the answer to the questions which everyone in the House and outside has asked in the light of the incredible confusion of recent weeks, when the whole package that Labour had said was carefully worked out and costed crashed into splinters on a dinner table in Luigi's in Covent Garden.

It may be that this afternoon the hon. Member for Oldham, West has answered one of the questions—whether the priority pledges are still priority pledges. I think that it could be read into his remarks that they are. But there were only two priority pledges in everything that we have heard until now. There is another in the motion, and the hon. Gentleman referred to it in his speech. It is the restoration of the earnings link.

If that is a priority pledge, is it also for immediate implementation? If so, that is another substantial increase in the Labour party's "immediate bill"—to use its words—which it does not know how to meet. Is the hon. Member for Oldham, West going to answer these questions? They are the questions to which everyone wants to know the answer. Indeed, we need to know the answer to have any chance whatever of judging just what Opposition Members think they are saying. If the hon. Gentleman does not want to answer——

Mr. Meacher *rose——*

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State is getting very nervous in his fabrication of bogus questions. We have made it absolutely clear that the pensions link with earnings will be restored. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Perhaps Conservative Members who want to know the exact date when all these changes will be made will answer the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) just asked. The Government propose to cut income tax by 5p, from 25p to 20p. At what rate will it be phased in? All in the first year? Or 1p a year? How will it be paid for? That is not in the Government's public expenditure plans.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that any reduction in income tax will be subject to all the usual considerations at a particular point in time and that no commitment has been made about specific timing.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) *rose——*

Mr. Newton: No, I shall not give way, as this is important.

We are faced with something quite different from any aim that the Government might have to reduce income tax further. As I understand it—the hon. Member for Oldham, West can tell me if I am wrong—we are confronting firm commitments, which have frequently been reiterated, to implement promises on child benefit and the retirement pension immediately. The hon. Gentleman does not dispute that.

In the motion, the hon. Member for Oldham, West has linked a third ingredient—the earnings link—which had never been put in those terms before. That implies that it should be seen in those terms. I can only read into what the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has just said the fact that restoration of the earnings link is not a priority for immediate implementation but what the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) would describe as a "desirable aim"—this year, next year, some time or never.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Could my right hon. Friend help me in my confusion? I thought that I heard the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) say that he felt that our social security programme was too expensive and that Midland Montagu had quoted a price of about £25 billion. Did my right hon. Friend gather from that that the Labour party was thinking of cutting our social security expenditure programme? If expenditure were to increase above that, how is the money to be found?

Would my right hon. Friend kindly help me, because I am increasingly confused by the fact that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said that the Labour party programme will include a link with earnings for retirement pensions. Government may have some control over inflation, but it is absolute pie in the sky for any party to say that a link could be attached to average earnings, over which there is no control.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend underlines the argument I was seeking to make in response to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North. Of course, the Government have clearly set out, in a variety of documents, their forward commitments on public expenditure. Nothing suggested by the Labour party would reduce those commitments, but it has put forward a wide range of proposals—including the proposal that my hon. Friend adverts to—which would increase those commitments by about £37 billion, and we do not yet know how that will be paid for. We do not even know how the so-called immediate priority commitments would be paid for.

From widely reported events involving the Leader of the Opposition, we understand that the critical ingredient—the removal of the upper earnings limit—is likely to be phased in. Will it be phased in? If so, how? Will those closer to the earnings limit—the less well-off—get the first bash, or will all those involved pay 5 per cent. in the first year, 7 per cent. in the second and reach 9 per cent. in the third? In that case, phasing in simply means that the same group of people will be clobbered not once but year in, year out, for as long as it takes to get the money.

Crucially, since we were told that the package was carefully costed and balanced, if revenue is to be phased in, will commitments be phased in too? Do they cease to be immediate priorities?

I sense that I shall get no further answers, and I conclude by saying that the hon. Gentleman's statistics do not add up and his financial calculations and policies do not stand up. Both the House and the country will rightly conclude that they should vote his motion down.

5.33 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I do not intend to continue the conversation about statistics as the Secretary of State has largely conceded that argument. I merely put on record that his quotations from the report of the Select Committee on Social Security were highly selective, especially the crucial quotation about average living standards having increased. Under the Government's stewardship, the poorest people have received the smallest increase. I hope that before the end of the debate someone

[Mr. Frank Field]

will have read the report for the Secretary of State and passed him a note so that his junior colleague can put that on record.

I wish to mention some of my constituents who are now without hope because of the policies pursued by the Government. I do not say that everyone in Birkenhead is in that position, nor that some people have not managed to improve their lot during the Government's stewardship, but I wish to register the fact that destroying people's hope destroys something important for their status as citizens and I shall devote the four minutes of my contribution to that.

I hope that if I introduce some of my constituents to the House and to the Secretary of State, the right hon. Gentleman will instruct the junior Minister to provide in his reply the message that he wishes me to take home to them.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Vote Labour!

Mr. Field: Apart from the Whip's general comment, for the first group we want immediate hope rather than waiting until April or May. The first group comprises those who have left school and have no work and are not on a training course. The Government made a promise about the courses that would be available, but they have shifted on that. I refer not to the Department of Social Security but to the Department of Employment. There was a specific promise that people not at school and not in work would be guaranteed a training place. That has been relegated to a general promise, but my young constituents are not covered by a general promise—they are individuals, and a small army of them do not have the training places that they want and have great difficulty in drawing benefit. What message does the Secretary of State want me to take home to them?

The second group are those who have left school with no hope of finding work. As the unemployment figures rise, more people's heads are pushed below the sea of unemployment and remain below it for some considerable time. A group of people in Birkenhead, after leaving school and trying and failing to get work, are now bringing up families but have never known what it is like to work. What hope has the Secretary of State to offer them? They are not terribly interested in the figures that he is bandying across the Dispatch Box. They want the chance to work. What concrete hope does he hold out for them?

Thirdly, what hope does the Secretary of State hold out for the young mother who came to my surgery and matter of factly described the difference between sleeping on the floor of her parents-in-law's home, which is carpeted, and sleeping on her own floor with no carpet? What hope does he hold out for my constitutents who find themselves in that position? What hope does the Secretary of State hold out for other young constituents who, after years without work, have managed to find it? One constituent, because he had to get to work before public transport started running in the morning, had to buy a bicycle to get through the Mersey tunnel to work. Because he wanted to work, he snatched at that opportunity. The employer, knowing his power because many other young people wanted the job, played the field and sacked him. Now he has to meet the debt caused by the bicycle. He searched again for a job and found one in Chester. The employer, aware of his powerful position, would not pay in advance but told my constituent that he would have to exist in some way or other until the normal pay day came round. Given the rules that the Department operates, what hope does the right hon. Gentleman hold out for such young constituents who are struggling for work?

The debate is about showing that, whereas some people are not at the bottom of the pile, many are just a few wage packets or salary cheques from being pushed to the bottom.

A constituent of mine, who worked at Cammell Laird, had a heart attack. The first correspondence that he received from the company after the heart attack was to tell him that he had been made redundant. He has two young sons; one is working and the other is not. The working son earns a low wage and the other is on benefit and therefore should be making a contribution toward the costs of the household. As the Minister knows, the benefit for those in that son's age group is desperately low. But the son in work earns even less than the son on benefit and finds it even more difficult to make a contribution to the household.

That former worker at Laird's told me with great pride that the one great thing that he has done is to bring up a loving family. That is his great treasure, but he now realises that if he and his wife are to survive and get the extra help that they need, he will have to put his sons out. More help would then be available because the sons would not be considered as part of the household. That is the way the Government have been destroying hope over a long period.

The next election will not be fought on the finer points of the Select Committee report or what consultants say will be the costs of the next programmes: it will be fought, I hope, on the fact that the Labour party appreciates what the difficulties are and is determined in the next Parliament to give back hope to those people at the bottom of society who have had their hope destroyed by the Conservative Government.

5.41 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): It is always a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I have been lucky enough to do so on a number of occasions in social security debates. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not follow the comments that he so movingly made about his constituents.

I think that it was Abraham Lincoln who said 140 years ago:

> "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all of the time."

In the past few months, and certainly in the past three weeks, the Labour party has been trying to defy that norm and to fool all the people all of the time. The hon. Members for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) and for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) have been trawling up and down the country trying to outbid each other in the promises and commitments that they have made to special interest groups in the sole desire to win votes for the Labour party at the next general election.

Mr. Allen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman yet. Will he please sit down?

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us get on.

Mr. Burns: The House will find that the hon. Gentleman will speak to disabled groups and promise them more money immediately.

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Burns: I shall give way when I finish the point.

The hon. Members for Nottingham, North and for Oldham, West have visited groups of young mothers, the elderly, pregnant mothers, young people, and the long-term unemployed and promised them all more money. What is happening is a cruel deception. Those hon. Members are speaking to audiences and telling them what they think those people want to hear in the hope that they will vote for the Labour party when polling day comes. I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North now.

Mr. Allen: No, thank you; I have changed my mind.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to have silenced the hon. Gentleman. That does not happen often.

What groups have not been singled out by the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of British politics in their grubby pursuit of votes for the Labour party? It is like a magic roundabout—and when the roundabout comes full circle they are not lost for time, but start again outbidding each other with further promises to all those special interest groups to try to secure their votes.

We have a further problem, although it does not seem to matter to the hon. Member for Oldham, West, when it comes to what has become known in British political history as "Beckett's law". The Labour party is spreading pledges of spending money like confetti, but Beckett's law states that only child benefit and pensions will be the priority. However, we learned last night in the debate on the autumn statement that a third priority is to be added to Beckett's law, relating to industrial policy.

The shadow Department of Social Security team has pledged £15 billion of spending commitments. That is no more than a cynical attempt to win votes. The Opposition are building up hopes and expectations, but if we were ever unfortunate enough to have a Labour Government, those aspirations would be cruelly destroyed by the reality of office because the Labour party has no ability to honour so many of the pledges that it has made.

For party political reasons, the Labour party refuses to recognise what has been done by the Government to help the genuinely less well off, the disabled, the unemployed, the elderly and the sick. In the past 12 years, a great deal has been done. It ill befits any politician to criticise the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. As a junior Minister, and as a Cabinet Minister with responsibility for social security, he has fought his corner decisively to ensure that more money is made available by the mandarins at the Treasury to help the less well off in our society.

No one listening to the doom and gloom of the hon. Member for Oldham, West would fully appreciate the exact size of our social security budget. From April this year, the social security budget will be more than £70 billion per year. Those hon. Members who do not appreciate the sheer size of that budget should bear in mind that it is equivalent to £1·35 billion per week, £192 million per day or £8 million for every hour of every day of every week of the year. That is all being spent to provide for the less well off in society. It is a pity that the Opposition do not have the decency and integrity to acknowledge that fact and to mention it once or twice.

One would think that there was not a penny in the social security budget if one listened to the hon. Members for Nottingham, North and for Oldham, West day after day in the Chamber and in the country. They complain about and cry down every Government addition to the social security budget. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his speech, and as I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Oldham, West, they fail to do justice to the fact that pensions have increased in real terms and money for the sick and the disabled has increased in the past 12 years. I honestly believe that a little more credit should be given for the money that has gone in particular to the sick and disabled to help them in their times of crisis and to make their lives better. In 1988, eight out of 10 pensioners had extra income from savings, compared with six out of 10 under the previous Labour Government, and 73 per cent. have additional occupational pensions compared with 52 per cent. in 1979. We have heard no mention of family credit, which helps a record 356,000 families—four times as many as those helped under the old family income supplement in 1979.

We have heard little today from the Opposition about the substantial extra help given to pensioners over 75 and to those below that age who are disabled. Apart from their hollow spending promises, Labour's only answer is a minimum wage. Imagine the fatuous reality of implementing that proposal in this country. A minimum wage would do more to put people out of work than any help it was designed to give. Experience in France and the United States shows that a minimum wage is a con. It would be a con on the British people, for while it sounds simplistically attractive in principle, in practice it would cause more misery by causing more job losses.

Labour also proposes the introduction of a pickpocket tax that would have made Fagin proud to be associated with it. It would mean more money being taken from the people—*[Interruption.]* I refer, of course, to the proposal to abolish the ceiling on national insurance contributions. Many more people would be hit by that than Labour Members dare to mention. That has become obvious in the past two weeks in the shambles and infighting among members of the shadow Cabinet, who fear that Labour has been rumbled in terms of its tax and national insurance plans.

The Opposition motion is a sham and should be seen as such. The country at large should accept that dogs bark, cats miaow, and Labour taxes and spends.

5.51 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I hope that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) will forgive me if I do not adopt his approach to the debate. I would prefer—if I had to choose—the approach of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field).

I hope that we shall take the opportunity of the public discussions that will take place in the period leading up to the general election to try as best we can—I appreciate the party political pressures—to transform the debate to enable ordinary people to understand what is going on. When we come to the fine detail of issues, it is easy to lose

[Mr. Archy Kirkwood]

people, especially when we refer to large sums of money. For example, £35 billion does not mean a lot to people in Hawick high street. We forget that in the heat of political jousting. I make no complaint about that, because I shall be doing my fair share of dishing it out when the time comes. Let us bear that in mind as we near the election.

There are two ways of considering social security provision and the system as a whole. The Conservatives are more in favour—I put it no higher than that—of a low tax, low benefit system. They have been moving over the years in the direction of the American system—*[Interruption.]* I think I see the Minister of State dissenting from that view. I do not say that our system is anything like as freewheeling and inadequate as the American, but that is the direction in which we have been going. If there had to be a choice between two systems, it is fair to say that the continuing trend that we have experienced under Conservative rule in the last 12 years has been to make provision, but to try to constrain the benefits system while maintaining a low-tax economy.

The alternative system—this is common ground, certainly bearing in mind the remarks of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)—represents a trend in the opposite direction. We on the Opposition Benches would be prepared to carry a higher burden of taxation and to redeploy or redistribute the money in as sensible a way as possible. While there may be substantial differences between my party and Labour about how that money would be redeployed, I have basically described the divide between the two sides of the House.

In other words, the electorate have a clear choice. I am happy to go to the voters on the basic principle that they have a straight alternative between the Government position and the proposals of the Opposition parties. That is almost as far as one need go to enable people to make a sensible choice.

Even so, important subsidiary arguments can be brought to bear. The Government must defend their record. Like the hon. Member for Chelmsford, I dissent from the official Opposition view that everything that the Government have done has been a disaster. The Minister of State can take credit, along with the Secretary of State, who has fought his corner well—the Treasury has been the problem in many respects—for many of the changes for the good affecting the disabled.

The Government must defend their record in terms of the amount that the social security budget consumes because of the level of unemployment in Britain. In other words, part of the social security argument must be about the way in which the Conservatives have managed the economy. Indeed, if they continue to make the sort of mess that they have been making—particularly recalling the 1987-88 period, when they made substantial blunders as a result of deregulating the economy, with the explosion of credit and so on—we shall find ourselves in an even worse situation.

I fear that high levels of unemployment will be with us for much longer than we would like to see. If that turns out to be the case, our plans for long-term social security planning will have to be revised, even if the Conservatives are returned to power. After all, £35 billion will not go far in the next five to 10 years if chronically high levels of unemployment persist. So we must decide which side of the argument we are on. Do we want a transatlantic model of social security provision, or more of a European, collective scheme of the type that my hon. Friends and I favour?

We can have a meaningful debate about the way in which benefits are deployed. Having served on the Standing Committee which considered the Social Security Act 1986, certain areas of provision are causing me concern. I accept that recent increases in provision for the over-75s have helped, but the present generation of pensioners do not receive a basic level of support as a result of the changes that were made in the 1986 Act. Some of the changes resulting from that legislation have been welcome, but major problems must be addressed because of the structure that was created by that Act.

The provision made for those in the 16-to-17 and, generally, the under-25 age groups must be reconsidered, because there have been some unforeseen consequences of that legislation. Some of those changes are being seen in the streets now. I feel sure that that was not the Government's intention, and that they are as concerned as anyone else to remedy matters. Whatever the complexion of the next Government, they will have to deal with those issues.

I am concerned about the way in which the social fund changes have been made. I have constituents with what I consider to be bona fide claims which the social fund cannot meet, and the next Administration, whatever their complexion, will have to deal with those. I have not seen the Secretary of State lose many arguments in exchanges across the Floor of the House, but he lost substantially when he took on the hon. Member for Birkenhead after having foolishly quoted selectively from the Select Committee report.

While I am willing to hear the Government's answer, it seems incontrovertible that the bottom one fifth, particularly pensioners, have lost in the total income increase of 31 per cent. between 1979 and 1987. That poorest fifth receives a 19 per cent. increase. If that is allowed to continue year in, year out, the next Government will have to deal with it one way or another. It may be expensive, and they may have to be ingenious in how they target the money. I do not care how it is done, but something must be done in the medium to long term to cope with the problem.

We have spent precious little time debating the levels of benefit. We must look much more carefully at how the demographic structure is changing. The "Social Trends" report published recently makes an important contribution to that. It has become difficult to describe family structure, which has become a meaningless concept, because there is such a diverse and wide range of combinations, and it is becoming ever more complicated. That may be good or bad—I make no judgment—but, in trying to deal with income problems from the social security bunker, we can easily forget that some of the overlapping changes in the population's social structure have a severe and dramatic impact.

I am particularly concerned about the impact of long-term unemployment on the hope in people's hearts, to which the hon. Member for Birkenhead referred. The social security system may not be adequate to deal with that, and the voluntary sector may have a role to play. I do not suggest that the voluntary sector in terms of charity should replace the money provided, but it could play a greater role.

Finally, I am very worried about rural poverty. My constituency is a rural area and it looks idyllic, as Ministers who have visited it will confirm. Of my 103,000 constituents, 5,000 pensioners and 6,000 non-pensioners are on income support. If dependants' families are counted, some 17,000 people are dependent on income support in the borders and south-east Scotland. The poor are getting poorer, and rural poverty is beginning to be an issue for the first time since I came to the House in 1983. I hope that the Government will do something about that.

If the Minister of State wants to do something immediately, will he talk to the Benefits Agency about the relocation of the cold weather payment temperature station? I have just checked the figures, and I have found that the Eskdalemuir station has been triggered 11 times in the past six years. The newly selected Boulmer station, which serves a large chunk of my constituency since the recent changes, has been triggered only once in that period. The system may have been unfair before, but it is now extremely unfair. I shall take the Minister to Eskdalemuir and Boulmer if he would like to come. He had better bring his kilt and his thermal underwear, because the point will be made to him graphically. If some of those points were made to the DSS, a better system could be introduced.

6.3 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I rise to oppose the Opposition motion and to support the Prime Minister's amendment because real freedom is economic, and the freedom to earn and spend one's own money as one wishes, untrammelled by state control, is the truest freedom of all.

When I consider how the Government have managed to increase the economic freedom of the British people, I see a good track record. That is why, despite my lifetime's work for those in need in the United Kingdom and overseas, in common with the work of so many colleagues in the House, I do not believe that the Opposition's vision of the United Kingdom is realistic. Indeed, were the Opposition to reach the status of Government for which they fight so hard, growth in the United Kingdom would be badly hindered because we would have lost our product champion. The Conservative party can champion the United Kingdom, but the Opposition cannot do so because their vision of this country growing ever poorer is ever further from reality.

Since 1979, the net disposable income of the average family has risen by 37 per cent.—a truly massive increase. I am sorry that there is a recession, but it is, after all, world wide and not unique to Britain. Despite the recession, Britain has achieved 800,000 new jobs since 1979. In addition, 3 million new firms have been created, which is nearly a two thirds increase in the number of businesses. Despite the depressing figures pumped out by the Opposition on firms going bankrupt and companies going into liquidation, in the past 12 months for which figures are available there were only 30,000 insolvencies—just 3 per cent. of the total number of firms in the United Kingdom.

The authoritative low income statistics produced by the Select Committee on Social Security in May 1991 and commissioned by the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies show that real disposable incomes grew by more than 30 per cent. between 1979 and 1988, with increases in real income at all levels of the income scale. I mentioned earlier that the net disposable income of the average family had risen by 37 per cent. Although averages are difficult to grasp when one is feeling the pinch, which is an uncomfortable position to be in, real disposable incomes in the United Kingdom as a whole rose by nearly a third. Indeed, households at the very bottom income decile saw their incomes rise by 9·5 per cent. during that period. Less well-off families with children also saw large increases.

The incomes of non-pensioner couples in the bottom half of the income bracket with children rose by 19 per cent. in real terms, and even the poorest fifth of full-time workers were 21 per cent. better off in 1988 than in 1981. According to the Select Committee report, the number of people on less than half the average income in 1979—when that is held constant in real terms—fell from 3·7 million to 2·5 million. Those who were pensioners in the bottom half of the income decile fell from 29 per cent. to 23 per cent., with a consequent fall also in the number of pensioners.

Statisticians know how difficult it is to make meaningful comparisons. The Library managed to give me an index showing wages and salaries in 48 major cities. On this basis, London is 24th in terms of gross salary and 22nd in terms of net salary. That means that people here get a higher net salary than people in Stockholm or in Paris. On top of that, believe it or not, house prices in the United Kingdom are relatively cheap, especially in comparison with Germany, one of our largest and most influential competitors.

Far from being able to support the Opposition motion, I put it to the House that this country and western Europe have had a long and perhaps unique period of growth over the past 12 years. The Opposition cannot pretend that that is due to their policies. It is due to good, solid, Conservative free market policies. I know that the Labour party says that it is no longer socialist, despite its continued return to centralism. But if socialist policies were able to achieve those much higher levels of income for the human race, why is it that the World bank and the International Monetary Fund, with their new conditionalities for helping the poorer countries of the world to improve their incomes, do not follow socialist policies? The new conditionalities that govern the lending proposals of the World bank and the IMF, the lending proposals that have helped poorer countries get upstairs in terms of income and share western European and British prosperity, are free market conditionalities. They are the free market with a heart—in other words, the true Conservative philosophy.

That is why I suggest that the Labour party is misleading the public grotesquely, sadly, disgracefully, abominably. I do not think that the public are willing to be misled. I honour the Labour party for trying to be the modern Robin Hood, but its facade of a modern Robin Hood will not work. I give one small example: despite the Labour party's social security promises to raise child benefit and payments to pensioners, an Opposition spokesman has already managed to account for nearly half that spending wish-list, £15 billion out of £35 billion, by talking about other commitments which are supposedly equally high priorities.

The truth is that the Labour party will not mislead the public sufficiently to be elected, because the public are too hard-headed. The country has grown wealthier and happier under our management and will continue to thrive.

6.13 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I must say to the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) that "Social Trends", published yesterday, shows that the incomes of the top 5 per cent. of the population have increased, whereas the incomes of the bottom 5 per cent. have fallen. That is the answer to many of her points.

I represent one of the poorest constituencies in the country, a constituency in Tower Hamlets. I can cite, from experience at my surgery, hundreds of cases of poverty and people living in hardship that would wring the hearts of even Conservative Members. I shall deal with statistics that draw together different sections of the population and show what is happening and how poverty is increasing. I shall mostly use official Government statistics on households with below average incomes.

The Government have tried repeatedly to change the definition of poverty. They accept that, if a person is dying of starvation, he or she is living in poverty. But they will not accept what most people believe, that if one cannot keep up with the community in which one is living, if one cannot send one's children properly clothed and shod to school and give them enough money to take part in extra-curricular activities, if one cannot give them a decent meal and some presents at Christmas—in other words, keep within the society on a decent level—one is poor and living in poverty.

The attempt to redefine poverty has gone on for a long time. In May 1989, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore), the then Secretary of State for Social Security, made a speech under the heading, "The end of the line for poverty", in which he had the cheek to claim that poverty no longer existed in Britain. Other Conservative Members have also tried to make that point. The storm that that speech provoked proved to be the end of the line for the right hon. Gentleman. He should have known better, because he told me at one time that he grew up in the east end of London. But he did not know better —he had forgotten what poverty was.

The Government continually try to fiddle figures. Unfortunately, despite their attempt to appear to abolish poverty, it has continued to increase. They try to abolish the word from their official reports instead of trying to abolish poverty itself.

In 1989, the Government's own manicured figures showed that the number of people at or below supplementary benefit level had grown by more than 50 per cent. Their response was merely to abolish the low-income family statistical series and replace it with the households below average income series, which they hoped would disguise the trend of increasing poverty. Unfortunately, the trend was so stark that no amount of statistical manipulation could make it vanish.

The Government's statistics show that the number of people in families earning below 50 per cent. of average income did not just double between 1979 and 1988, but increased by more than two and a half times from 4,930,000 to 11,750,000. The figure of 10 million has been quoted, but the Government's statistics show that it was 11,750,000. Those statistics have been confirmed by independent researchers, such as the Breadline British team, who carry out scientific studies of poverty and deprivation in Britain today. The figures also show that more than 11 million people live in direst poverty—that means that 20 per cent. of the population and more than 25 per cent. of our children live on or below the breadline. That is a dreadful picture, but it is true.

Margaret Thatcher repeatedly claimed——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order.

Ms. Gordon: I am sorry. The previous Prime Minister —*[Interruption.]*—repeatedly claimed that everyone had become better off under the Conservatives. What a terrible slip: I am sure that hon. Gentlemen are very worried that I used the name instead of the constituency, but I doubt that the unemployed will worry unduly.

The Government's statistics state that in 1979 there were 1 million unemployed people in Britain, but in 1988 there were more than 2·5 million unemployed people living in poverty. I believe that there are many more than 2·5 million unemployed people living in poverty, but let us take that figure, which is awful enough. The families of these unemployed people have not done better under the Conservatives.

Then there are the pensioners. In 1979, there were just over 1 million pensioners living in poverty. By 1988, there were more than 3·5 million. Those people have not done better under the Conservatives. In 1979, there were just over 1 million low-paid full-time workers living in poverty. In 1988 the number had risen to 2·5 million. Low-paid workers have not done better under the Conservatives either. In 1979, there were 500,000 single parents living in poverty. In 1988, there were 1·5 million.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Gordon: No, I will not. The Minister refused to give way to me twice. I have only a short time and I will not give way. I want to finish drawing this picture.

By 1988, 1·5 million single parents, three quarters of all single-parent families, lived in poverty. They have not done better under the Conservatives.

The last group I want to mention was dealt with at length by the Minister—the sick and the disabled. The increases in benefits for the sick and the disabled have not been sufficient to shield even them from the overall effects of Government policies. Yesterday's "Social Trends" showed that, whereas the top 5 per cent. of the population spent 12·4 per cent. of their income on indirect taxation, indirect taxation took up 24 per cent. of the income of those in the bottom 5 per cent., which includes the sick and disabled. That is just one example. By 1988, three quarters of a million sick and disabled people were living on low incomes. Clearly, they are not better off under the Conservatives.

The increase in poverty has taken a terrible toll. Its effects can be seen by everyone in the number of youngsters begging in the streets. I remember going to Paris with my school the year before the war, when I was 15, and seeing beggars outside Notre Dame. I was shocked because it was the first time that I had ever seen beggars. One did not see beggars even during the depression but now one can see them everywhere on our streets. While we sit in the warm and dry, thousands of old people sit huddled over one-bar fires in cold, damp houses. Those are the terrible effects of poverty.

Poverty has also had an effect on health. Look at the statistics. For 150 years, the death rate for young males between the ages of one and 44 had been falling—the only interruption in that decline being the slaughter of young

men during two world wars. Now doctors save more and more lives but, since 1985, the death rate for males in that age group has started to increase. The Government have managed to achieve what previously only the German armies achieved. Why are young men dying? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, come on."] Okay. Of the richer countries in the world, only Britain and America, which pursues the same voodoo economics as we do, have an increasing death rate among young males. The Registrar-General's report and the report of the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys—the House will admit that that is not a biased Labour report—stated that the main causes of the decline were poor diet and suicide. In the past 12 years, the suicide rate of young men has risen dramatically—by 50 per cent.

The desperation caused by poverty is increasing and making more and more young men suicidal, but it is women who are bearing the brunt of that increasing poverty. They have to absorb and handle the whole family's emotional turmoil, trauma and despair caused by unemployment. They also make up the majority in all the disadvantaged groups whom I have mentioned. They are the majority of pensioners and, therefore, of the sick and disabled. They are the majority of low-paid part-time workers. They are the majority of single parents. They are also the widows of those who have died prematurely. Women are certainly not better off under the Conservatives.

6.22 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): I wish to address the issue of poverty in my constituency and as it affects many of my constituents, and to focus specifically on the related issues of ill health, unemployment, old age and inequality.

I represent a diverse constituency made up of deeply rural, scattered, ex-mining villages—geographically isolated and suffering from heavy structural unemployment —and large so-called peripheral housing estates, housing people from the conurbations of Middlesbrough and Stockton. Those areas too suffer from high and continuing unemployment—its effects made worse by the comparative isolation from the facilities of central Middlesbrough and from families and friends still living in the town.

I do not intend to be emotional on these subjects—although emotions certainly run high when local people discuss the Government's wicked and callous neglect of areas such as Langbaurgh. I intend to make the figures speak for themselves.

Experts have long recognised that there is a causal relationship between unemployment and ill health. Much of the pioneering work on the subject was carried out on Teesside—in particular in Stockton-on-Tees—in the early 1930s, when empirical and sustainable evidence was first produced to suggest that the links between health, nutrition, disposable income and work patterns were strong, lifelong and of the community and—perhaps most important in today's terms—that the problems were solvable.

It is perhaps a mark of how similar the 1930s and the present day have been on Teesside that the work has been taken up again. In the late 1980s, Cleveland county council, together with representatives of the community health councils in the county and the then family practitioner committee, issued a report on the health divide which appeared to characterise the Cleveland community. The report—called "The Health Legacy"—showed comprehensively and conclusively that, in terms of physical health, there was a clear link between poverty and unemployment and ill health. The study showed that, according to the figures available, above-average death rates resulted in more than 800 extra deaths per year. Deaths from diseases of the lung were running at 25 per cent. above average. People in Cleveland die almost two years younger than other members of the wider community.

The links between poverty and ill health were graphically depicted. In parts of the borough of Langbaurgh where, as a result of the Government's policies, unemployment and poverty are part of the social landscape, the mortality rate rises to as much as 50 per cent. above the national rate and can be twice as high as in the more fortunate parts of the county of Cleveland. Put simply, the gulf in health and mortality between the rich and the poor in Cleveland is among the most extreme in the whole of the United Kingdom and some local people in areas of high disadvantage can expect to live 10 years less than those in the more affluent suburbs.

I represent parts of the county where the picture is bleakest. The study to which I referred earlier—"The Health Legacy"—showed that the east Cleveland villages of Skinningrove and Brotton and the south Middlesbrough overspill estate of Hemlington have 'standardised mortality ratios'—the official measure of the death rate—running between 15 and 50 per cent. above the national average. To put it quite simply, there are communities in my constituency where, because of the high incidence of unemployment and low income, people have a lower expectation of life and a more unhealthy existence than anyone living in the comparative comfort of southern England—and certainly of anyone here tonight.

It is not just a question of unemployment. Ageing, ill health and poverty are all linked. The elderly are the largest single group living on low incomes in my constituency—25 per cent. The majority are widowed, live alone and are utterly vulnerable to the effects of poverty, many having no occupational pension. Labour Members know—and Conservative Members know privately, even if they have to deny it publicly—that basic state pensions have had the little purchasing power that they once possessed cut drastically. It is a simple fact—but one that needs to be uttered time and again—that, if earnings indexation had not been ended in 1980, the basic pension would now be £17·50 higher than it is. Nationally, one third of the elderly are below what we consider to be the poverty line—three times the rate for the population as a whole.

Elderly people also suffer in terms of access to what many people regard as normal parts of daily life. The mushroom growth of out-of-town retailing—shopping designed to meet the needs of the high-spending car owner —has forced many elderly people to use expensive estate stores, or even dearer mobile shops. The value of an already depleted pension is thus eroded even further.

The outline of poverty in Cleveland is sharply focused. The areas where poverty is at its worst are bleakly obvious. Unemployment and ill health are the most obvious features, but low wages, the loss of assured, continued employment, the break-up of marriages, the loss of stable family relationships, and eroded—indeed, almost valueless —benefits are all part of a deadly spiral that absorbs all too many of my constituents.

[Dr. Ashok Kumar]

The dimensions of poverty are self-evident. The situation has worsened. The yawning gap between low incomes and high incomes has widened. Wealth generates wealth. Only last week, the Inland Revenue published figures showing that the richest 1 per cent. of the population own 18 per cent. of the nation's marketable wealth—the wealth contained in homes, household durables, savings and investments—whereas the poorest 50 per cent., or half of the population, own less than 6 per cent. of that marketable wealth.

The decline in mortality nationally has been more marked among manual workers and the unemployed than among the nation's white-collar workers, and there is evidence that this trend is accelerating. The Tory think tanks, which argued that wealth would trickle down, that increased prosperity for the rich would have an impact on the lives of the poor, have been shown to have been telling fairy stories. Instead of wealth trickling down, we have seen wealth streaming upwards.

The legacy of Lloyd George, Beveridge and Aneurin Bevan—a decent health and national insurance scheme—has been squandered in 13 short years. Benefits are dismal and have been eroded in value. In 1979, the state pension was 20 per cent. of average earnings. I believed then, and I still believe, that that figure was too low, but even it has been cut and now stands at 16 per cent.

I intended to speak about various other aspects of this matter——

Mr. Allen: Wrap it up.

Dr. Kumar: I have been told from the Front Bench to wrap it up.

In conclusion, I have to say that, as a Member of Parliament representing an area where poverty is an inescapable fact of daily life and not merely a subject for a college lecture theatre, I am deeply and utterly angered by the conditions in which far too many of my constituents have to live. I am deeply angered too by the disinterested and offhand treatment meted out to the poor by the present Government. I have seen too much silent suffering, too many families faced with disintegration, to treat this matter as an idle debating foil.

The poorest in our society need a Labour Government. They need a Labour Government who recognise the importance of ordinary human needs; they need a Labour Government who have the insight, the ability and the muscle to change things for the better and to aid their own community in its task of mapping out its destiny. They need, above everything else, the knowledge that they can come out from the shadows to which they have been consigned by 13 years of Tory heartlessness and indifference.

6.33 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My hon. Friends the Members for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) and for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) have told the House how so many of their constituents are suffering as a result of Government policy. I wish to do likewise, and to do so by briefly making three points.

Undoubtedly, many pensioners live in great poverty. I understand that the Government do not deny this, but they say that most pensioners have improved their lot—something that we question. None the less, they do accept that many pensioners suffer hardship. Indeed, they could hardly deny it.

This week, I received from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), an interesting answer to a question that I had tabled. It illustrates only too well what we are concerned about and what we want to see changed. The junior Minister informed me that, according to the latest information, 22 per cent. of pensioners have an income of less than £60 per week.

Can hon. Members imagine what it is like to live on less than £60 a week? If there are Conservative Members who believe that it is easy, that no great hardship is involved, let them try it for just a short period. That is something that I have suggested before. According to the answer to which I have just referred, 38 per cent. of pensioners have an income of less than £70 a week. As the pension is increased only with price increases, any change that has occurred since those figures were provided cannot have made a great difference.

That is the background to this debate so far as a very large group of people—the pensioners—are concerned, leaving aside people of working age who are unemployed. When so many retired people in this country have to live on such incomes, it is clear that there is something wrong. It is understandable that so many pensioners should take the view that they are considerably worse off than pensioners in many other European Community countries.

I want to mention also the changes that occurred in 1980, when the link with earnings was broken. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that pensioners had lost, I think, £23 a week. In fact, he was being too generous to the Government. A note that I have received from the Library shows that, if the pension had been increased in line with earnings since 1980, married couples would be better off, by April of this year, by £28 a week, and single people by £17·65. That is how much pensioners have lost. Had the link not been broken, pensioners would be that much better off.

The second matter concerns housing benefit and the changes made in 1988. Other figures in the answer to which I have referred are also interesting. I asked how much of the income was spent on rent and poll tax. The percentage is considerable. Those on less than £60 a week pay 20 per cent. of that in rent and poll tax, and someone with less than £70 a week pays 24 per cent., or nearly a quarter. That increases the poverty and the hardship, and it is something that must be changed when a Labour Government come to office.

The final point that I want to make is one that I have made repeatedly. It concerns the additional difficulties that those on low incomes experience during the winter months. In my view, the cold weather payment is inadequate. There ought to be a far more generous scheme. The payment is made only when the temperature falls to zero or below for seven consecutive days, and the amount is £5 a week.

The Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): It is £6.

Mr. Winnick: Yes, £6.

But it is often very cold even when the temperature does not reach zero—as it is today. People on low incomes find

it even more difficult to make ends meet when they have to try to keep their accommodation warm. It is very warm in this Chamber, and Members of Parliament, when they go home, do not have any difficulties about heating, but how on earth is it possible for anyone on less than £60 or £70 a week to keep a home adequately heated? I am, of course, taking into account any heating additions to income support. How do such people, during the winter months, pay electricity bills and gas bills? It is understandable that pensioners, fearful of receiving heating bills that they could not possibly meet, ensure that they economise. Unfortunately, many of them put themselves in danger of hypothermia and other health risks.

Figures and accusations have been bandied about today. I must be perfectly frank and say that I do not know whether a Labour Government could do everything that I should like done to relieve poverty. I shall not say that much of what I should like to see done could be done within the first few months, or even the first few years, of a Labour Government's term. However, my party is genuinely committed to trying to relieve the poverty that far too many people in this country are living in.

We are not talking about a few thousand or even a few hundred thousand. That would be bad enough—indeed, with any of our fellow citizens in such a plight we should be concerned—but we are talking about literally millions of people. I do not believe that there is genuine commitment on the part of Conservatives to end poverty. They have none of the commitment that we have.

If, when in office, a Labour Government are not doing as much as they should be, although I believe that they will take the right steps, there will be immense pressure from Labour Back Benchers—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I do not apologise for saying that. I notice no such pressure from Tory Back Benchers on the Government, because, as I have said, they have no genuine commitment to ending the hardship and destitution which so many of our fellow citizens suffer. That is why we need a change of Government; we need a Labour Government, whenever the election is called, to try to sort out the difficulties that we have described tonight.

6.39 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I welcome this debate because poverty can be a difficult issue to discuss. It is a great tribute to the Conservative party propaganda machine that poverty is not on the daily agenda and is not a matter of public outrage in every daily newspaper. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has some measures in mind to help free up the press in this country, which in turn will facilitate an open debate so that more and more people are made aware of the real causes of poverty.

Poverty is not given the importance that it deserves. There are some disabling popular prejudices about it. For instance, it is always something that affects other people. It is barely talked about even by many of those whom it affects. A tremendous stigma attaches to it. People feel a sense of personal failing, of unworthiness and of isolation —even of resignation. They feel that there is nothing that they can do about it. All of that must change if this nation is to get the best from people and if people are to make the best of themselves.

As though all of that were not enough, there is also the crushing weight of deliberate Government policy to contend with. For the first time in modern British history we have had a Government who, as a central plank of policy, have actively encouraged a fundamental redistribution of wealth from those who do not have to those who have plenty. There are many pretty ways to express that, but the Conservative vision of society, even at its one-nation softest, always demands a broad class of the poor for its philosophy to work. In the past 13 years it has been clear that greater poverty would always accompany the experiment of monetarism, and that the fate of people at the bottom would always be a price well worth paying —provided that it was paid by someone else. We can only guess at the social costs—the personality deformities, the distrust, the desperation, the promotion of criminality, the personal and family stress and the results of that in terms of broken marriages, broken homes and broken lives. Although it is obvious even to advocates of monetarism that the experiment has failed, its consequences will be with many of our people for a long time and perhaps for the whole of their lives.

In many ways the physical costs of poverty are easier to measure and thus easier to combat. We all know the problems of low pay. We know from statistics produced by the Low Pay Unit that the difference between people on the lowest and highest incomes is bigger now than it was in 1886. Many pensioners know that they cannot buy enough for their own needs. People on the state pension alone immediately fall below the poverty line and are eligible for income support, assuming that they claim it. Mothers know that child benefit was frozen, that the Government left it to wither on the vine for three years before they saw the election coming up. The list is a long one. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) described it earlier: maternity grant abolished, earnings-related additions phased out, special needs payments abolished, unemployment benefit cut in real terms, benefit withdrawn from 16 and 17-year-olds, benefit cut for 17 to 25-year-olds.

Under the Conservative Government, the steady and deliberate creation of poverty has been endless—to the point at which one person in six lives below the official poverty line. That is the society that the Government have created and the situation that we shall need to terminate after we come before the electorate in the next few weeks. The electors will decide whether the society created by the Government, who did not even believe in society, must be changed. We certainly intend to change it.

The redistribution of wealth has not been accidental. It has been calculated and callous, it has been paid for by people on or below average incomes, and it represents the most massive attempt at social engineering in this country this century.

In the brief time that remains to me I shall outline one or two measures that we intend to take after 7 May. We shall have plenty of chances in the months and years ahead to right the wrongs of the Conservative Government. We shall start by implementing Labour's two pre-funded commitments. We shall immediately increase the pension for the single person by £5 and for the married couple by £8. Thereafter, we shall link increases in pensions to increases in earnings—the link that was so callously broken by the Conservatives in 1980. Ten million pensioners—*[Interruption.]* This is the bit that the

[Mr. Graham Allen]

Conservatives do not like. Ten million pensioners—not the top 1 per cent., not the people on £70,000 per year—will benefit from Labour's proposals.

We shall restore child benefit to the value that it had in 1987, making it £9·95 for every child, thereby ending the distinction between children in a family which means that some get more than others. That was a scandalous separation. This too will benefit not a handful of people on top tax rates but 7 million families.

After 7 May, those who have been abused by the Government will start to find just a little of what they have lost being returned to them. It says a great deal about our values that we place pensioners and mothers and children at the very top of our agenda—even above many other vital priorities. It says a great deal about our values and principles that for their sake we will endure the lies and misrepresentations about our tax policy which is necessary to pay for these people's security and peace of mind.

Mr. Newton *rose*——

Mr. Allen: The right hon. Gentleman will only take up his colleague's time, but I am pleased to give way.

Mr. Newton: Before the hon. Gentleman goes too much further with his rhetoric, does he realise that about £1 billion of the money to which he has just referred will go to those in the top half of income distribution?

Mr. Allen: The Secretary of State should enjoy his last few weeks in office and not try to give us lectures—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] We shall get there in good time. The right hon. Gentleman should not try to lecture us on redistribution. As the Treasury's man in the Department of Social Security, he has presided over the transfer of £31 billion from pensioners' pockets to causes that the Government believe in. We will take no lectures from him about that.

As resources permit, we shall introduce other measures to eliminate the list of poverty-creating Conservative measures. In addition to steps to alleviate direct poverty, we shall build pathways out of poverty across the whole range of Departments, including decent standards of training, better protection against discrimination, special attention to the needs of people with disabilities, improved statutory maternity protection, investment in child care facilities, and a vigorous campaign against the cheap "Arthur Daley" employers, spearheaded by the national minimum wage of £130 per week. It is clear from the reception of our plans by Members on the Government Benches that the policies are in place: in 14 weeks' time, so will be the people who will carry them out.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Michael Jack): We have been treated for the past few minutes to what I can only describe as Labour's "dodgers' charter". The remarks of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) contained not one reply to the questions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State put to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) about Labour's pledges and Labour's financing of the false manifesto of ideas that they claim represents their policy on social security.

I shall come to those because we have a proud track record in social security. Anybody who can stand at this Dispatch Box and talk of a budget of more than £60,000 million as our expenditure pledges on social security can point to real policies, serving real people, with real benefit, and giving real hope to those who need our social security system. To hear the hon. Member for Nottingham, North talk about child benefit in a year when we have announced three increases in child benefit beggars description.

I remind the hon. Member that I said to him in Committee, when he led the charge by recommending that he and his hon. Friends vote against our regulations on income support, that it was his party which voted against the increase in child benefit in October reaching all children in the country; it was his party which voted against our proposals to enable family credit to reach up to 65,000 additional people; it was his party that voted against our proposals to extend the carer premium—all of that from the party that says it cares. It is on the record. Hon. Members know the people they voted against—yet they have the audacity to stand here today and tell us that their priority is the children.

Labour Members have tried to give us some lessons about our taxation policy. I will put one particular figure to the House.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): Where is the poll tax?

Mr. Jack: It is in the pockets of Labour Members who will not pay.

Since we brought in our reductions in higher rate taxes which so disappoint the party opposite, the proportion of Inland Revenue income from that group has risen to more than a third of total tax take. The Opposition have not learnt the simple lesson—reduce the price and increase the tax revenue—that enables us to increase our income and our spending on social security. It is a very simple point.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State put a number of questions to the hon. Member for Oldham, West today. I should not like to be in the hon. Gentleman's shoes as he sits by his telephone in Oldham this weekend waiting for his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to ring and ask about the latest list of so-called pledges. I will give him an opportunity, because I am a fair person. In his remarks, the hon. Gentleman attacked our proposals and our thoughts on income support levels, he attacked the social fund, and he attacked the payment of half mortgage interest for the first 16 weeks. I invite him now to rise and tell the House what he would do, where the money would come from and when he would implement it. I will give way to him now if he would like to do that.

There is an ominous silence——

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I did not ask the hon. Member for Nottingham, North.

He had his opportunity, but he did not answer the questions. The hon. Member for Oldham, West failed to answer, so we know that, like all the other so-called pledges, his proposals are the confetti of persuasion, sprinkled with gay abandon around the meeting halls of the country in the hope of getting people to believe that

Labour is the party of social security. The hon. Member for Oldham, West is playing fast and loose with the public's expectations and they will find him out.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State drew the attention of the hon. Member for Oldham, West to the fact that the hon. Gentleman does not understand the way the national insurance system works. The hon. Member for Oldham, West is still trying to persuade other hon. Members and the public that anyone earning less than £20,280 a year will not be touched by his pickpocket approach to financing. He asked us to provide some examples and I will try to assist him.

The first example is that of a computer salesman on basic pay of some £12,000 a year topped up by, say, £5,000 commission on his monthly salary during the year. He would pay an extra £4·45 per week under Labour's proposals. A process and production engineer, and there are some of those in Oldham, on a gross salary of £19,926, including—the hon. Member will not like this—£6,000 of profit-related pay, would pay an extra £8·55 per week in national insurance payments under Labour's proposals. As for good old overtime, the hon. Member may say that not much overtime is being worked at the moment, but for those who we know will be on overtime when the economic recovery comes a person on £17,492 with overtime payments of £3,734 in any one year would find himself £2·12 per week worse off. Can the hon. Member for Oldham, West stand up now and deny those are real-world examples of people who will be worse off under Labour? I invite him to repudiate that.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw) *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I will resist. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) has not taken part in the debate and I still have much information to give.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West tried to suggest, in his new-found enthusiasm for Europe, that everything across the channel was absolutely wonderful. He pointed out to us that other people were doing so much better. I suggest that he goes on a little trip and visits his Dutch colleagues in their Government. He will find that the Dutch are discovering that their budget deficit, directly related to their spending on social security, will require to be cut back. They are ending the earnings-related part of their social security just as the hon. Gentleman, as my hon. Friends will know, is introducing that feature into his social security plans. Belgium is worried. Germany is facing greater social security problems than Denmark and even France. If the hon. Gentleman will go and see for himself, he will find that other European countries are waking up to this problem.

If the hon. Gentleman does not believe me, let him go to the Library of the House and consult the *Financial Times* of 11 January, in which Mr. Harry Riley says:

"Upgrading state pensions would be one of the immediate priorites of a Labour regime in the UK, but all over Europe other governments are searching for ways of reducing their pension commitments."

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his right hon. Friend before him realised in 1986, as his predecessors had also realised, that there was a need in our social security system to direct money to those who most needed it and to make certain that our social security policies were affordable by the nation. We took that difficult decision, we introduced those reforms and we have modernised the delivery of our social security system with one of the most modern computer systems in Europe, all to make certain that the right amount of help with benefits such as family credit, our improved premium in income support for the elderly, the 152 per cent. increase in real terms in spending on the disabled, could reach the people it needed to, and above all be afforded by the tax and national insurance payers who have to foot the bill.

It is absolutely clear now that the hon. Member for Oldham, West does not care a jot about those who have to pay and that he has learnt nothing from what has actually happened in Europe.

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Jack: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish my speech. He has had his say.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West made about 56 pledges on social security but he did not guarantee that they would be implemented on day one of an incoming Labour Government. He has engaged in mythology and has not said where the money will come from. The shambles of Labour's tax and national insurance proposals clearly shows that the two so-called firm pledges and the other 50-odd are not worth any of the reams of paper on which they are written.

Much has been said about pensioners. The Opposition do not like it when we proudly boast that pensioners' average total net incomes increased by 34 per cent. between 1979 and 1988. They do not like it when we say that average incomes for occupational pensioners virtually doubled in the same period. They certainly do not like it when they see that the wealth-creating society over which we have presided has ensured that 46 per cent. of pensioners have their own homes.

We know that some pensioners need less help from the social security system than others and we have taken steps to ensure that the money goes to those most in need. In outlining his four case studies, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked whether we could offer some hope to his constituents. I offer a message of hope not only to his constituents but to the many thousands of people who, through family credit, enable the social security system to be a creative organ.

Since family credit was introduced we have made almost 2·5 million successful awards. Some 352,000 people currently benefit from an average payment of about £30 a week. From 1 April we plan to enable more than 65,000 more people to have family credit. That offers real hope and is an example of our innovative, affordable and honest approach to social security, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 208, Noes 246.

Division No. 53] **[7.01 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Bellotti, David
Allen, Graham	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Alton, David	Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bermingham, Gerald
Armstrong, Hilary	Blair, Tony
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Blunkett, David
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Boateng, Paul
Ashton, Joe	Bradley, Keith
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Barron, Kevin	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bell, Stuart	Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*

Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lord, Michael
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thorne, Neil
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Timothy Wood and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House warmly endorses the Government's policies for focusing considerable extra help on the most vulnerable in society; welcomes the further real increases in benefits shortly to take place for many older less well off pensioners and hundreds of thousands of disabled people; notes the Social Security Select Committee's conclusion that real disposable incomes grew by 30 per cent between 1979 and 1988 with increases in real income being seen at all levels of the income scale; believes that policies which provide more choice and greater opportunities are the best way of helping people to create a better life for themselves and their families; and recognises that, if implemented, Her Majesty's Opposition's confused tax and spending plans would impoverish the whole nation, increase unemployment and destroy opportunities.

Ravenscraig

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): We now come to the debate on Ravenscraig. Time is limited. Many hon. Members wish to speak, so I appeal for short speeches. I should also inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the Government amendment.

7.14 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the repeated failure of British Steel to support and invest in its Scottish plants, culminating in the announcement that Ravenscraig is to close in defiance of guarantees given by the company; calls for British Steel to honour these guarantees and for the Government to explore with determination every possible means of saving the steel industry in Scotland, including the search for a new owner and the use of new technology; deplores the inadequate response from Ministers to the present crisis; and demands a co-ordinated and determined drive to rebuild the Lanarkshire economy which has been cruelly damaged by the policies of both the Government and British Steel.

This debate is about a great industry and the trouble which has befallen it. Inevitably much of the spotlight will fall on the role of Government. I suspect that the Secretary of State is in difficulty and is embarrassed by his predicament. Well he might be.

At the end of last week, as the right hon. Gentleman may know, I put down a priority written question. It was a simple request for a list of dates of any meetings in the last six months between Ministers in the Scottish Office and British Steel. The list could not be long, and it did not require an extensive diary search. The first effort at a reply was:

"I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible."

Clearly the Secretary of State had no great interest in getting the information on the table. However, he may have had a tactical rethink, because today there crept on to the board a reply. It was the reply which I had expected. In the last six months, the entire contact at ministerial level between British Steel and the Scottish Office boiled down to one meeting on 6 January, after the Government knew that the closure decision had been reached.

According to reports in the *Sunday Mail*, the Scottish Office knew as early as 20 December that closure was coming on 8 January. It is a serious charge, but I fear that, as Ministers contemplated the grim future, their one thought was how best to survive the fine mess that their own incompetence had created.

So far as I can find out, the Secretary of State did absolutely nothing to influence events. I am strengthened in that conclusion by a letter which the Secretary of State wrote to me on 14 January, in which he told me precisely what happened at the meeting on 6 January. I remind the House that that was the one meeting at ministerial level with British Steel in the last six months. What happened at the meeting was that he

"pressed Sir Robert very hard indeed to make public British Steel's assessment of market conditions".

Faced with the final blow, with the long history of decline, and with the abdication of duty which has marked their course, the Government finally got into the presence of top management of British Steel, merely to press Sir Robert to make public the market assessment which had made him decide on closure. That is a fit comment on the total lack of action and the lack of fight shown by the Scottish Office over the years.

That is typical of the hands-off, do-nothing approach which has been the hallmark of the Government. Successive Secretaries of State have been licensed to protest carefully packaged concern for Scottish consumption only. The one condition laid down was that no action was to follow and no real pressure was to be mounted on British Steel.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House what action he would take? When the Labour party refers in the motion to

"every possible means of saving the steel industry in Scotland, including the search for a new owner",

does that mean that he would propose the nationalisation of Ravenscraig?

Mr. Dewar: I genuinely regret having given way to the hon. Gentleman. As he well knows, that will be the burden of the main part of my speech. He has an important role as a substitute Scot on this occasion. I hope that he will stay, listen and learn.

Suspicion of the Government's plans and of their attitude became a certainty when the Department of Trade and Industry finally blew their cover. Perhaps I do not recognise an unsuspected luminary, but I do not think that there is a representative of the DTI here. I remind the House that the DTI is supposed to be the lead Department in this business. That absence is therefore the height of discourtesy. *[Interruption.]* I know that the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) likes to run everything, but so far as I know, he is not yet running the Department of Trade and Industry. He may be omnicompetent in the Scottish Office but, so far as I know, he has not yet got beyond the Scottish Office.

When we saw the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), he was disastrously frank. I recall it because it made such an impression on me. He said that he was doing nothing to help, because the Scottish Office had not asked him to do anything. The harsh truth is that there has been no real attempt to derail British Steel's plans. The search has always been for a face-saving formula, never for a solution.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. John Marshall: The hon. Gentleman would nationalise the industry.

Mr. Dewar: I shall deal later with the hon. Gentleman's point.

What can now be done? There has been a long campaign to try to persuade British Steel to consider offers for the Ravenscraig plant. British Steel now says that it will do so, but I fear, because one has to face reality, that it has probably agreed to consider offers because it is confident that offers will not be forthcoming. The tragedy is that, when there was an opportunity to find a buyer, it was fiercely obstructed by British Steel. The Secretary of State for Scotland lamented that fact before the Select Committee but, as far as I can determine, he did nothing to unblock the logjam. The option of a new owner should be kept on the agenda for as long as possible.

The possibility of new technology must also be examined urgently. It was identified as a possibility—not, I admit, as a strong possibility—in the Arthur D. Little

report. I know that it is still being investigated by Scottish Enterprise. Many of those who have followed the argument will be familiar with the innovative proposal that has been put forward. It contemplates the linking of thin slab casting to traditional steelmaking techniques. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), showing more energy and determination than any Minister, is going to Indiana in the next week or so to look at one of the plants where thin slab casting is in operation. I do not pretend that it is an easy option, but it must be pursued to find out whether there is any possible way forward.

Dalzell is still producing plate. As everyone connected with the plant knows, the Labour party has always maintained that there is a case for investment there, and it has consistently challenged the single plate mill strategy. It is not in the best interests of the industry. In our view, it was always likely to be bad news for Dalzell. Sadly, that was almost borne out.

Circumstances have changed. The recession has undermined the plan for a new plate mill on Teesside. The Government should be pressing for the modernisation of Dalzell, including the installation of accelerated cooling. It still remains a low-cost option. In hard times, it must be attractive to British Steel.

There are no short cuts, however. This is a time for realism. I want to make it clear, as I have done in the past, to the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) that we do not believe that nationalisation is the answer in this case. If I believed that it was, I should be arguing for it.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. Brown: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman will not give way.

Mr. Dewar: If the hon. Gentleman is expressing surprise at what I have just said, it shows that he is abysmally ignorant of the debate.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Brown *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: Let me again make the point that we do not believe that in the current circumstances nationalisation is an option or a way out for British Steel. If the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) can understand and digest that statement, we can come back to it.

Mr. Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No. I believe that nationalisation is no more than a slogan—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—in these circumstances. It is a doubtful luxury, available only to a party with no expectation of gaining power. I say that honestly. It is irresponsible to consider nationalising the industry; it would hold out hope where none exists. The arguments do not stand up. I repeat that, if I thought they did, I should argue for nationalisation. It is not a matter of dogma; it is a matter of doing what is right for the steel industry and for the people of Lanarkshire who have taken such a pounding.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Dewar: The nationalists want Ravenscraig to operate—hon. Members will correct me when they speak if they believe that I have got the detail wrong—on two blast furnaces, tied to the Dalzell plate production, with a pipe mill on an unnamed Motherwell site. The problem is the market.

Dalzell, expanded to 1 million tonnes—two or three times current output—could survive only on the assumption that British Steel was not competing in the market. Plans for a new plant at Teesside would have to be abandoned. Plate production at Scunthorpe would have to be closed, together with the welded pipe mill facilities at Hartlepool. Ironically, the whole scheme would depend for its viability on British Steel's acquiescence.

There is no escape in myth-making about the North sea market. Every authoritative commentary tells the same story. Structural steel, tubes and plates for the North sea are not required in sufficient quantities to breathe life into the SNP headlines. All the signs are that the market will fall sharply over the next few years. It is—to use a perhaps unhappy phrase—no more than a nationalist pipe dream.

This is not a plan to rescue Ravenscraig. It would be left as a slab producer, in effect tied to one outlet. If it runs on one blast furnace and produces 1 million tonnes, the cost base will be wrong. If it loads effectively at 2 million tonnes, there will be a surplus for which there is no demand. The European hurdle on competition policy would be formidable. An operating subsidy would simply not be available.

I say all that with no pleasure, but I do so because I am not prepared to be dishonest and go down a road that I do not believe is open. The SNP claimed initially that its target was the restoration of Ravenscraig, complete with a hot mill, cold reduction plant, relined blast furnaces and much work done to such facilities as the coke ovens.

In order to discredit the pointed attack, on grounds of cost, by the Ravenscraig stewards, the SNP has been reduced to confusing market capitalisation with British Steel's asset value—as it does in the most blatant way in this pamphlet that I am holding. It is nonsense to pretend that the share capitalisation of the company is relevant to the argument in favour of putting plant on the ground. It is a deliberate attempt to falsify the argument, and suggests a certain desperation. The back-up has been to dispute the integrity of the stewards whom they were once proud to praise and who are universally seen as having fought a sustained and courageous campaign in defence of the steel industry.

The SNP once did a lot of running in and out on Scottish industrial matters, including nationalisation. I remember when the nationalisation of the shipbuilding industry was on the agenda. SNP Members sat in the Chamber tearing up telegrams from the work force on the grounds that they did not believe in that particular form. The scheme that has now been produced has changed shape and content several times.

[Mr. Dewar]

It is worth remembering that there is no provision for this adventure in the ingenious sums cobbled together by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) to form his so-called Scottish Budget. The scheme has only one essential virtue for the nationalists: it gives them something to say.

The debate takes place on the day that *The Sun* has declared itself the house journal of the SNP. I fear, although I may be a little over-confident, that that will turn out to be something of an embarrassment to the party. In the context of this debate, the party might care to remember that, on 9 January, *The Sun* considered the future of the steel industry and claimed that that particularly misbegotten group of men, the socialists, could

"only throw money at problems."

It went on to pronounce:

"Sure, 12 hundred jobs could be saved at Ravenscraig. But in the end the price would be the loss of ten times as many jobs elsewhere."

The Sun's principal columnist happily contributed the thought.

"Ravenscraig should have been shut down years ago."

All that I can say about *The Sun* and the company that it is now keeping is that, if it is a conversion, it is not one based upon principled conviction. I predict that the future of that misalliance will be private grief for the SNP.

We must look to the future. There is much that must be done to rebuild and strengthen the Lanarkshire economy. Although I can only sketch what needs to be done, I shall try to state what I believe are the most important points. The sites must be dealt with and reclaimed. It is no use the Government paying lip service to the principle that the polluter pays when the Secretary of State for Scotland announced on 13 January, as though it was good news, that British Steel would clear the Ravenscraig site

"down to ground level and . . . leave it in a tidy condition".
—[*Official Report*, 13 January 1992; Vol. 201, c. 672.]

The Government must not be allowed to cover their retreat with a handful of grass seed.

I believe that the enterprise zone was scrambled into the frame only when the closure announcement loomed. The *Sunday Mail* reported that the Scottish Office had indeed been pushing for that, and that there would be £100 million of investment, but that has now been reduced to £50 million.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I shall correct that mistake from the hon. Gentleman now, but I shall deal with some of the others later. That is entirely and absolutely without foundation.

Mr. Dewar: Of course I take the Secretary of State's word for that. It was not scrambled quickly into the frame when the announcement of the closure was known. However, I understand from a press release from Sir Leon Brittan's office, which reached me today, that a formal application under article 93.3 of the treaty was launched only today. That does not suggest that there has been a great deal of forethought or planning.

I am conscious of the difficulties that may arise. I understand the problem over the Mossend freight village and terminal. There are always difficulties over the boundaries of enterprise zones. However, I think that, on balance, that is an important part of the package, and something on which we expect the Secretary of State to deliver. The package that the Government have put together lacks coherence and shape. It is a case of anything and everything being thrown together. Significant sums would have been available in any event. I refer to Lanarkshire development agency's and East Kilbride development corporation's contributions.

I hope that the Secretary of State will be prepared to listen to the local community and that he will create some sort of forum in which the ideas of the local community can be taken into account and considered in a wider way than has been possible up to now. It is important that emphasis be placed on infrastructure improvements, and especially on the M74 and M8 link.

Lanarkshire does not want a series of reports on infrastructure questions—a buck-passing exercise to a regional council that does not have the finance. We must capitalise and have a targeted strategy to encourage development around the freight terminal and the new electrified line linking Motherwell to Glasgow and Edinburgh. I hope that that will be tackled with more energy than hitherto.

There must be a real drive to improve training and to encourage innovation. The Government should consider the possibility of establishing a central institution of Lanarkshire to give a new impetus to the excellent work that is carried out by the existing colleges there. My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) will have a word or two to say about training towards the end of the debate. The experience and expertise of East Kilbride development corporation's industrial team should be kept together.

The Labour party has argued for a Scottish innovation centre. There are many examples of similar successful ventures in Europe, some of which have an almost international reputation, such as the Steinhers Foundation in Baden-Württemberg. Such a venture would give a boost to the local economy and allow companies to plug into a Europewide network of technology transfer so that even the smallest firms would have access to the best of the world's technologies and to the expertise that would allow them to put that technology to work. It would offer positive support on production methods and marketing. It should be based in Lanarkshire, complementing the work already carried out at the National Engineering Laboratory in East Kilbride.

I finish——

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: No.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Dewar: No. I appreciate——

Mr. Oppenheim What a pathetic performance.

Mr. Dewar: I should like to conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I am conscious of the fact that, although very few Conservative Members will seek to participate in the debate—and certainly very few from Scotland—many hon. Members have constituency interests and want to participate.

There can be no promises of an overnight transformation. The Government's dereliction of duty has

contributed to a major crisis. I refer to their failure to challenge British Steel at a time when such a challenge would have had an impact, and to the ravages of a recession that was made, at least in part, in Downing street.

We argued for a DTI task force, and found no sign of life. We pushed for an export drive, but got no reaction. We looked for a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, but got no co-operation. There has been no attempt to force British Steel to honour its guarantees at a time when the market was more optimistic and there was the possibility of new owners.

The Secretary of State will claim that everything possible is being done that could be done, but that is simply not true. Promises and expressions of concern there are in plenty, but what is missing is the commitment and determination to fight unemployment and industrial decline. We have had soothing words from the Secretary of State. Suggestions that unemployment in Lanarkshire is not as bad as it might be add insult to injury. A male unemployment rate of 16 per cent. is no justification for the kind of complacency that we have seen in recent months. There has been one meeting—after the event—with British Steel in six months.

The charge remains—not that Ministers have failed, but that they have never really tried. Their record of inactivity strips them of all credibility. The Secretary of State can hardly complain if he and his colleagues are not trusted by the people of Lanarkshire and of Scotland. This Government should go, and surely will, whether it be in April or May. There will be no reprieve—and neither should there be.

7.36 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"commends the Government's response to the announcement by British Steel of its decision to close Ravenscraig; acknowledges the extensive and effective nature of the measures already being undertaken by the Government as part of its continuing commitment to improve the economy and infrastructure in Lanarkshire, in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, the Lanarkshire Development Agency, and a range of other public and private bodies; welcomes the Government's commitment of some £120 million since the beginning of March 1991 for economic development and training in Lanarkshire; and supports the proposal by Her Majesty's Government that an enterprise zone be established in North Lanarkshire."

The kindest thing that could be said about the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) is that he must have been fazed and thrown by the extraordinarily good news of the winning of the contract for three frigates by Yarrow in his constituency. What a pity that he did not find it possible even to express his appreciation for that. Instead, he spoke in a wholly sniping, dull and negative way to a motion that is wholly negative. He did a considerable discourtesy to the House in failing to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), formerly the Member for Brigg and Scunthorpe, who has direct and close experience of the steel industry. My hon. Friend said that he was surprised by that. Of course he was, because the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) gave a firm commitment to the House—admittedly four years ago, which is probably a long time in the life of the Labour party. He said that Opposition Members "strongly believe"—not just "believe"—that

"the steel industry is most appropriately owned in a form of public ownership."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 184.]

Therefore, when my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes read the Opposition's motion, which states:

"That this House . . . calls . . . for the Government to explore with determination every possible means of saving the steel industry in Scotland",

he clearly thought that "every possible means" would include nationalisation. However, it turns out that that phrase not only does not include nationalisation but that nationalisation is "no more than a slogan".

Mr. Michael Brown: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. He may recall that I served on Standing Committee D in the 1987-88 Session. Having listened on many occasions to the then Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), as well as to the hon. Member for Dagenham, I can confirm that we heard a commitment to renationalise the steel industry at virtually every Standing Committee sitting. As a member of that Standing Committee, I can confirm that my right hon. Friend is correct.

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend and hope that there will be time in the debate for the House to benefit from his experience.

The tone of the Opposition's motion is without doubt interventionist, dirigiste, and very much in the mould of the old Labour party, calling

"for the Government to explore with determination every possible means of saving the steel industry in Scotland".

Indeed,

"it isn't intervention that the steel industry needs. What the steel industry needs is a more vibrant domestic market, specially in the manufacturing sector and a chance therefore to make even further increases in their productivity and be more competitive in difficult international markets."

The industry does not need

"some civil servant or minister sitting on their shoulder saying to them well, strategically this is what we think you should do".

That is what I believe. It is also what the Leader of the Opposition believes. Those were not my words but his words from today's *Financial Times*. He said:

"it isn't intervention that the steel industry needs . . . some civil servant or Minister sitting on their shoulder saying to them well, strategically this is what we think you should do."

That quotation clearly puts the House in great difficulty. It discredits and disqualifies about 90 per cent. of what the hon. Member for Garscadden just said. But the position becomes more confusing. The interventionist motion tabled today calling

"for the Government to explore with determination every possible means of saving the steel industry"

bears the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Yet the article appeared in the *Financial Times* today with a quotation in inverted commas which gives the directly opposite view. Which is the view of the Leader of the Opposition—let alone that of the Labour party?

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Does the Secretary of State realise that this fourth form debating stuff is neither funny nor smart and impresses no one back in Scotland? Will he concentrate on what the Government can do in their dying moments for the steel industry in Scotland and for the people of Motherwell?

Mr. Lang: I just wish that someone on the Opposition Benches could help us. Perhaps next week at Luigi's the Leader of the Opposition will manage to extricate himself from the spaghetti in which he is entangled.

Mr. Dewar: The Secretary of State has been adamant that Government intervention and attempts to influence these matters are wrong as a matter of principle. Does he remember when his immediate predecessor as Secretary of State for Scotland said that the decision to close the hot strip mill at Ravenscraig was wrong and should be reviewed and reversed, and that his policy was to achieve that? Did the right hon. Gentleman support that?

Mr. Lang: Of course I did. I should have liked to see it happen. However, I do not believe in intervening in the steel industry to do it; nor do I believe that the Labour party believes in that. Certainly, its leader does not believe in it. I know that the Leader of the Opposition has a Welsh interest to protect. Perhaps it is asking too much to expect him to rise above the Welsh interest and look to the Scottish, let alone the United Kingdom, interest.

The Labour party must be in a great shambles when we hear that nationalisation is no more than a slogan and that the entire history of the Labour party's commitment to nationalisation not only of the steel industry but across the board is abandoned. The Leader of the Opposition says: "it isn't intervention that the steel industry needs . . . some civil servant or Minister sitting on their shoulder saying to them well, strategically this is what we think you should do." I am grateful to the Labour party for calling the debate tonight, even though it is a half-day debate on a Thursday, so that we could obtain that revelation about its policy on nationalisation.

I want to make a little progress on the positive measures that the Government are taking to meet the difficulties that Lanarkshire faces. It is important that we recognise the position as it has developed. When we came to office in 1979 we found an industry which was over-manned, under-invested, uncompetitive and riven with industrial dispute. Funds were being poured into it by the taxpayer at the rate of £100 million a month at today's prices. That not only failed to solve the steel industry's problems but damaged the interests of the taxpayer, other industry and the economy in general.

Some contraction was inevitable with the industry in such a state. It would not be particularly rewarding to reflect on how or why the Ravenscraig problems developed —whether the cause was the original decision of the Conservative Government to encourage the industry to locate the mill at Ravenscraig, the decision to split the effort between Scotland and Wales, the location 40 miles from the sea, the separation from the cold strip mill or the loss of Linwood. At Linwood industrial disputes eventually destroyed one of the major markets for its product, just as they destroyed many of the shipyards on the upper Clyde. We could reflect on whether nationalisation destroyed the old Scottish companies by moving their control to London and creating such a mess that it was impossible to reprivatise them on a Scottish basis.

The Labour party owes it to the House to tell us even now what it would do. We have heard what it would not do, but it must tell us what it would do if it were to win the election. It may find itself in office with four or five months to go. If it does, it will owe it to the people of Scotland to tell them what it will do. We heard nothing from the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the Secretary of State telling the people of Scotland that they will need to wait almost 10 years, as the people of Linwood had to wait, to see anything come into that massive empty factory space? Surely the Secretary of State has more to offer the people in Lanarkshire than he offered the people of Renfrewshire—nothing.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for a well-timed intervention which enables me to describe the initiatives which we are taking, have taken and will continue to take.

Mr. Oppenheim: Surely it would be within the power of the Opposition spokesman, should he ever become Secretary of State for Scotland, to take powers to insist that Ravenscraig should remain open. Why does my right hon. Friend think that the hon. Member for Garscadden is so unwilling to make that pledge?

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I wish that I knew. Some two and a quarter hours of the debate remain and I hope that the Labour party will make its position clear as the debate advances.

I wish to make it absolutely clear that I entirely share the general disappointment and dismay at the effect of the loss of jobs in Lanarkshire as a result of the closure of Ravenscraig. But what matters is action, not words, and it is action that the Government have been taking.

Mr. William Powell (Corby): My right hon. Friend knows that I have many thousands of constituents who have brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers who live in the Motherwell area and are involved with Ravenscraig. He will also be aware of the massive assistance that the Government granted to my constituency by creating the enterprise zone, by granting assisted area status, by a massive infusion of derelict land grants and of money for new roads and infrastructure, through European grants. They made available many millions of pounds for retraining and so on. My constituents in Corby would like to hear from my right hon. Friend that the same range of incentives will be made available to Motherwell.

Mr. Lang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, speaks with direct and substantial personal experience of the beneficial effects of the Government's measures. He knows the benefits that will flow from the Government's measures in Lanarkshire.

We are making good progress in providing assistance for Lanarkshire. Our plans are going forward in a businesslike and sensible way. As soon as we heard that the closure of Ravenscraig was to be announced, we accelerated the consideration, already well advanced, of the case for an enterprise zone in north Lanarkshire. The Government quickly concluded that the case for such a zone was strong. I announced our intention to seek EC approval for the establishment of the zone on the day that the closure was announced.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) challenged the Prime Minister. He said that there was good information that the Prime Minister knew about the

closure of Ravenscraig 14 days before the announcement. How many days before the announcement was the Secretary of State told about the closure?

Mr. Lang: I will not answer for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but I heard about the closure on 20 December. I made that clear as soon as the announcement took place. There is no great mystery about that.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): What did the Secretary of State do about it?

Mr. Lang: I advanced consideration of our preparation of our application for enterprise zone status and I persuaded my Government colleagues that that was a desirable step forward. On the day of the announcement I was able to write to Sir Leon Brittan, the Commissioner, to alert him to the fact that the United Kingdom Government would seek the Commission's agreement to the establishment of such a zone.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Lang: No, if the hon. Lady will allow me, I must make progress. I will give way to her later.

Mrs. Ewing: My point is about the enterprise zone.

Mr. Lang: Let me first say what I have to say about the enterprise zone. I will then give way to the hon. Lady if she still feels that it is necessary.

I spoke to Commissioner Brittan yesterday and I am pleased to confirm that formal notification of the Government's case for an enterprise zone in north Lanarkshire was made to the Secretary-General of the European Commission this morning. I know that the Labour party does not understand much about enterprise zones—after all, they were created by the Government—but they involve an enormous amount of preparation. That preparation has been carried out extremely thoroughly. When asked yesterday whether he thought that he had been informed of our intention at an adequate time, Commissioner Brittan replied that he considered it "pretty prompt". He added:

> "Time spent in preparing well prepared applications is not prevarication or time wasted . . . Time spent now in amassing detail could save time in the long run."

Mrs. Ewing: Although I do not wish to interfere in the argument about which of the Front-Bench spokesmen could more speedily achieve an enterprise zone, I believe that they should be fighting for the retention and expansion of the Scottish steel industry. Is it true that the condition that there will be no steel-making capacity in Lanarkshire will be attached to enterprise zone status?

Mr. Lang: That is the first time that I have heard the suggestion. It is highly unlikely. However, it is for the Commission to pursue and develop any conditions that it thinks appropriate.

I believe that our case is strong and that the zone will be of great help to north Lanarkshire, attracting many thousands of new jobs in a range of companies, thus broadening Lanarkshire's economic base.

I can also announce that I have approved the commissioning by Lanarkshire development agency of a consultancy study of the long-term economic development opportunities, to follow on from the immediate work in hand arising from the Lanarkshire working group's report.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am grateful for the Secretary of State's courtesy in giving way. I sincerely hope for the sake of the people of north Lanarkshire that the enterprise zone which is to be created there is given far more financial and other support by the Government than was the case with the Inverclyde enterprise zone. That so-called enterprise zone has proved to be a bitter disappointment and failure for thousands of my constituents who are unemployed.

Mr. Lang: While the Inverclyde enterprise zone has not yet made a substantial breakthrough because of the difficult circumstances in which it operates, it substantially enhances the opportunity to bring employment to Inverclyde. The hon. Gentleman was keen enough for it to be established. The Government were glad to be able to secure that for him and I should have thought that it was in our interests for both of us to work together to make it a success.

The resources and investment by Government in an enterprise zone take the form of income forgone, in terms of capital allowances, exemption from rates and other benefits. The estimated costs to the Exchequer from the enterprise zone in Lanarkshire are about £50·5 million, which is expected to trigger about £250 million of private sector investment and to create a substantial number of jobs.

Mr. Dewar: Perhaps the Secretary of State would write to me, as I am interested in his remarks. The basis upon which that figure has been arrived at means that he must be able to calculate the revenue loss, which presumably means that he has made assumptions about the size and occupation of the zone. Would he be prepared to put those calculations in the Library?

Mr. Lang: I should be happy to give the hon. Gentleman whatever information is available to the Government, but when one sets up an enterprise zone, one does not know the nature of the employment which will come into different parts of it. The zone is based on six areas, which add up to almost 500 acres. The Government's experience and estimates have been carefully negotiated and calculated as accurately as possible, and they are based on our experience in other enterprise zones and upon expected take-up of opportunities there.

Today I wrote to Sir Robert Scholey, the chairman of British Steel, to say once again that he should release sufficient evidence about the world domestic market situation in the steel industry and about Ravenscraig's costs and other circumstances to shed light on the factors which led the British Steel board to take its decision.

I pressed British Steel to help deal with decontamination of the Ravenscraig site and its restoration to industrial or other use by granting Lanarkshire development agency immediate access to site records and by funding and other support for a site assessment to gauge which parts of the site could be quickly redeveloped and which need special or prolonged remedial treatment.

I have further suggested that British Steel might wish to enter into early discussions with the public agencies involved about the future of buildings on the site and

[Mr. Lang]

about future site ownership and development, aimed at making the most of potential public and private sector contributions.

I pressed Sir Robert to say by how much the funding of the British steel industry will increase to take account of 1,200 additional job losses since its £10 million programme was announced in north Lanarkshire last June. I emphasised the importance of training measures, as they would give much valued flexibility in tailoring training and retraining to meet likely future needs.

During the past decade, in a sustained and systematic way, the Government have developed a programme to help Lanarkshire. The House will be familiar with the Motherwell project, which has run for about eight years, in which the Scottish Development Agency had invested about £56 million by 1987. That project is estimated to have created or saved about 4,000 jobs. The partnership and commitment to Motherwell established by the project is being maintained through the Motherwell enterprise partnership, led by Motherwell Enterprise Development Co., which had a budget of £930,000 last year.

There is also the Coatbridge project, which ran from 1983 to 1988, in which SDA expenditure totalled £22·8 million—a project judged to have created or safeguarded about 2,500 jobs. A number of enterprise trusts are operating, many initially 20 per cent. funded by the SDA, which now deliver services under contract to the Lanarkshire development agency.

Last year, in response to the developing situation, I set up a working group under the chairmanship of the Under-Secretary—my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) to review Lanarkshire's immediate needs and to develop projects. That was an immensely successful initiative, for which I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am grateful also to the many public sector individuals and bodies which came willingly and co-operatively together to develop effectively the sort of plans which are now being implemented—16 early action projects——

Mr. Adam Ingram (East Kilbride): On East Kilbride development corporation——

Mr. Lang: I have not come to East Kilbride development corporation yet. If I have time, I shall do so.

Sixteen early action projects—mostly industrial site developments—were identified and work has already begun upon 13 of them; two more medium-term projects are moving ahead and five others are subject to feasibility studies.

The remedial measures range across a wide spectrum of commitment in terms of finance and skill. Lanarkshire development agency had a basic budget of almost £3 million last year, to which was added an additional £15 million allocation, announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in May, and a further £4 million allocation for extra training. Scottish Enterprise was allocated about £5 million for use in Lanarkshire in 1991-92. Those resources were used by the SDA largely to develop sites purchased by the SDA in March 1991. Further resources, amounting to about £1 million, were put into employment action and training programmes.

East Kilbride development corporation's capital programme for the year in question was about £26 million. In addition, the Department of Trade and Industry, under the iron and steel employers re-adaptation benefit scheme for 1991-92, expected to spend about £28 million. The capital allocations to local authorities for factory building were set at £4 million, to enable a response to be made to the needs of the area.

Mr. Ingram: Hon. Members will recognise the important role that East Kilbride development corporation has played in the regeneration of the economy of Lanarkshire and Scotland and the role that it will play in the years ahead. Why is the Secretary of State proposing to wind up the development corporation within the next four years?

Mr. Lang: Such is the success of East Kilbride that it has reached a level of maturity where it no longer needs the special commitment of resources—which might be better used in other parts in Lanarkshire—to maintain and continue its development. East Kilbridge development corporation has handled its opportunities extremely well and has succeeded in attracting about one in five of all inward investment cases coming to Scotland. That, too, is for the benefit of Lanarkshire.

Lanarkshire has important advantages—it is well-located, with good communications, and the Government are doing all in their power to ensure that those are improved. I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House welcomed the decision by British Rail to locate its Mossend channel tunnel freight terminal in Lanarkshire. Considerable benefits will flow from that. The Government have also substantially expanded the roads programme to take special account of the needs of Lanarkshire with regard to the M8 and A8 and—most important of all—the improvement of the A74, which is being developed into a motorway.

The Government have a sustained, well considered and broad-ranging commitment to Lanarkshire. We are implementing policies that have proved effective and successful in Brigg and Scunthorpe, Corby and in other parts of the United Kingdom. Lanarkshire has got advantages and we are doing our best to help the people there to capitalise upon them.

Our amendment to the motion describes the

"extensive and effective nature of the measures already being undertaken by the Government as part of its continuing commitment to improve the economy and infrastructure in Lanarkshire".

I urge the House to reject the motion and to conceal it from the eyes of the Leader of the Opposition, who signed it. Instead, the House should endorse the words of the right hon. Gentleman which appeared in the *Financial Times* today, and support the Government's amendment.

8 pm

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): For the people of Motherwell, and for Ravenscraig steel workers and their families, this is a sad occasion. They have worked hard and loyally, they have learnt new skills, developed new methods, pioneered new technologies and triumphed over disasters. They have acted intelligently, with foresight, courage and integrity. They have achieved unequalled levels of performance.

Steel is the most dramatic of industries, but it is not an industry for drama. It is an industry for steady, careful, considered judgment, because a worker's life and those of his work mates depend upon what he does. Because the steel workers have felt, worked and argued their case in

that steady way—not just for our own interests as a steel community, but for the public who invested in the plant, for the customer and for the end consumer—they have seen the direction in which British Steel was taking us since the closure of Gartcosh in 1985, and even before that. It has been a long planned closure and now the workers have been told that British Steel is planning, finally, to close the works in September.

On Second Reading of the British Steel Bill in February 1988 I pointed out the likelihood that the privatisation of British Steel as a monopoly producer in the United Kingdom would lead to the closure of Ravenscraig, as British Steel exerted its unfettered monopolistic power to restrict capacity. I argued how a competitive solution, with the separate privatisation of Ravenscraig, Shotton and Dalzell, could give Ravenscraig a chance to demonstrate its market strength. But the Government would not listen. I said:

"If Ravenscraig is to be killed, it will die with dignity. But the House will understand the politically explosive effects in Scotland if our largest fully competitive industrial unit were closed with the Government having denied the test of the market, in which they believe".—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 215.]

That effect will soon show in the ballot box.

First, is there any possibility of a phoenix operation now that British Steel is pulling out? The chances are slim, but they must be pursued until all reasonable possibilities are exhausted. The search must be taken up again for a steel business elsewhere in the world that has the finishing mills which British Steel has stripped from Ravenscraig. It could be supplied with high quality slabs from Ravenscraig at lower cost than by building itself a new modern steel-making plant. Scottish Enterprise must explore all possibilities. It will not be easy, and the chances of success are not high in view of the excess slab capacity elsewhere in Europe seeking distress sales.

I put the different proposition of using Ravenscraig as a demonstration plant for introducing thin slab casting into the integrated steelwork BOS—basic oxygen steel—route. Arthur D. Little endorsed it as the other option worth exploring. It would be a world first, with a new product and a new process. The Secretary of State and the Government have never understood that the last thing that British Steel and other conventional steel producers want is a new process which will undercut their costs and make their plants obsolete, so it has been a mini-mill in NUCOR in the United States that has pioneered the new thin slab technology. Without the research and development resources of a big steel company, there are still surface quality and other problems that need ironing out before the product can sell as top quality strip. There is no problem about installing it on a BOS plant; the quality problems will be solved there. There were similar problems with thick slab casting when it was introduced and it was Ravenscraig that pioneered that and strip products in this country. In some respects thin slab strip has inherently superior qualities, with its finer grain from more rapid cooling.

NUCOR and its plant builder, the German firm, Schloemann Siemag, is ready to assist in the examination of possibilities at Ravenscraig. I have suggested that the most likely way forward would be with a consortium of at least three steel producers interested in a full-scale demonstration of the process on a BOS plant. The process is long past the pilot plant stage. Because of the reluctance of British Steel and perhaps other European steel companies to encourage a new process in their own market, the first member of the consortium might have to be a non-European steel company. Once it was apparent that the demonstration was likely to go ahead, European steel companies and, I suspect, British Steel—I have told it so—might have second thoughts. They might like to look at what is happening with the Japanese car plants.

There is precious little time to explore the options. I am going to NUCOR on 5 February to discuss the possibilities with the chairman, Mr. Kenneth Iverson. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for allowing an executive from Scottish Enterprise to come to NUCOR with me. British Steel has told me that its offer to sell the Ravenscraig plant will expire in September when it closes the plant. It has pointed out that the one remaining blast furnace will then be allowed to cool, which normally results in the collapse of the brick lining, making the furnace inoperable until it has been re-built at a cost of £50 million. The coke ovens would also collapse, and their replacement would cost £150 million. To continue operating Ravenscraig from September, it would have to use the existing thick slab concast, so only slab sales would be possible and that faces the difficulty of the present depressed state of the steel market.

However, the blast furnace lining and the coke ovens are coming to the end of their useful life—that has been a careful part of British Steel planning—so little would be lost if there was a break in production while a new thin slab plant was built, but it means that a new operator would have to spend at least £250 million putting the steel making end in working order. People in Motherwell would have no wish to keep a derelict steel plant lying around. They are not interested in a Mickey Mouse gimmick to keep the plant stumbling along for a year or two. They would also not wish the liability for the costs of the reclamation of the steel sites to fall on a shell company with no resources, which would not be able to meet the costs. There is therefore no interest in keeping British Steel waiting indefinitely against the contingency of a buyer turning up at some indefinite time in the future.

Conversely, it would not be in British Steel's interest to be over-hasty in the demolition of Ravenscraig if the effect was to incur the heaviest possible claim for the most expensive kind of reclamation and restoration of the site as a country park. The Government's consultants, appointed by the Lanarkshire development agency on the prompting of the Scottish Office, have estimated that that would cost about £200 million.

My experience of the operating management of British Steel is that, within the limits of their job, they are reasonable men acting in a reasonable way, and I am sure that it is in our interests in Motherwell to deal with them as such. I am sorry that the Secretary of State and the Scottish Office have not done that. There have been no informal meetings and no serious discussion, and now the Secretary of State has written formally to the chairman and wielded the big stick.

Everyone in Scotland supports the case for the modernisation and extension of the Dalzell works to the limits of its capacity as British Steel's lowest-cost option for the development of plate, and that is not now affected by the closure of Ravenscraig.

The Scottish National party policy for nationalisation as a solution does not add up, as *The Glasgow Herald* shows in articles today. My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will show that clearly, if he

[Dr. Jeremy Bray]

is successful in being called to speak in the debate. Once the election is over, Dalzell workers will be seen to be getting on with keeping their plant the model of efficiency, which is best calculated to win the long life for the plate mill that Motherwell desperately needs.

We must explore all possible avenues for steel, and we are doing so. The Secretary of State is utterly wrong to accuse us of not having specific proposals. We have some of the most specific and practical proposals, and I have the full support of the shadow Secretary of State, of the Leader of the Opposition, of the whole shadow Cabinet and of all my colleagues in Scotland in making these comments. It is therefore utterly preposterous for Conservative Members to think that my hon. Friends and I can be embarrassed on the token issue of nationalisation. We are not in that kind of political debating area. We are dealing with the serious business of industry.

Mr. Lang: I, too, am dealing with the serious matter of industry. I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would say which of his leader's policies he supports. He cannot support them both.

Dr. Bray: Just prior to the debate, I was at a meeting with the Leader of the Opposition at which I went over the grounds of our case. He gives us his absolute, full and unqualified support. We must explore all possible avenues for steel. Everyone in Motherwell accepts that our future lies in new jobs, new industries and a new image of Lanarkshire.

The Government's antics have been pathetic. I shall not go into the details of the enterprise zone because, from what the Secretary of State said, it is clear that he has not been informed about the way in which matters have been developed and formulated.

The Secretary of State did not even mention the new link that is needed between the M74 and the M8, running through the Ravenscraig site, a matter which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State was asked by the Prime Minister to investigate when we met the right hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman failed to do that to the extent of writing to me afterwards, saying that it was a matter for Strathclyde regional council.

We need the image-changing impact of a new Motherwell Parkway mainline station on that new motorway link and on the electrified Glasgow-Edinburgh mainline, with its InterCity services. We need that opening up of the steel sites as a new central Scotland business site linked to the overcrowded centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow. We need a new role for Motherwell and Bell colleges in providing vital new skills. We need the core developments that will launch new growth, with the encouragement and involvement of the private sector, which the Government have been totally inept in seeking.

We get none of that. We get, instead—this is typical—a cut in the housing capital allocation for Motherwell district council from the £25 million in the five-year capital programme to an appalling £15 million. What is the Secretary of State up to? Is he counting on the depopulation of Motherwell?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is making an incorrect claim because he is comparing the provisional allocation figure for 1992-93 with the final allocation for 1991-92. One must compare like with like. The council's housing revenue account gross provisional allocation for 1992-93 totals £14·767 million. When expressed on a per house basis, far from being a decrease it represents an increase to £451 per council house.

Dr. Bray: I will not pursue that matter with the right hon. Gentleman at this stage. I will follow it up in writing.

Motherwell people hesitate to put to the Secretary of State any of the lively suggestions now being made because he simply strangles them at birth. He has made a total shambles of the redevelopment of Lanarkshire. Now that he has demonstrated the depth of the Government's incompetence, the people of Motherwell just want to get rid of the Government so that we can get on with building a new life for a viable and worthwhile comunity.

8.14 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): It is impossible to listen to the remarks of the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) without appreciating his knowledge and sincerity. I assure him that we feel for him as he obviously feels for his constituents.

Before dealing with the subject of the debate, I must say that, on a day when we have had such wonderful news about Yarrow, it is important to put on record our congratulations to the management, work force and design team there on having produced a contract that was manifestly acceptable to the Government. It is right also to pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Scotland for the part he played in achieving this vital order for the west of Scotland.

I look on this debate about Ravenscraig, sadly, as a lengthy extension of the debates we had on Gartcosh many years ago, when I forecast—at that time I voted against the Government—that, if we gave way on Gartcosh, it would be the long-term beginning and end of Ravenscraig. I regret that that has turned out to be the case.

That is why I am annoyed with the directors of British Steel for their action. We are talking of a great industry, and British Steel has a responsibility far wider than a normal public company with a board of directors responsible to its shareholders: it has a responsibility to the nation. It is British Steel, not Motherwell steel, Llanwern steel or Shotton steel. As British Steel, it has a responsibility to its work force, epitomised so wonderfully by Tommy Brennan over many years—I was delighted to see him mentioned in Her Majesty's new year's honours list.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The hon. Gentleman said that British Steel was responsible to its work force. He will be aware that British Steel negotiated an extraordinary package of redundancy money, representing two years' pay for workers made redundant at Ravenscraig—double the amount paid in the strip or general steel division. If the plant had stayed open until 1994, British Steel would have had to pay wages for two years and, on top of that, redundancy money. So, in effect, the company has stolen, on average, £30,000 from every Ravenscraig worker.

Sir Hector Monro: I do not profess to be a great expert on the ins and outs of British Steel and its relationship with its work force. I want to talk about the future, and the direction in which we may have to go.

I am extremely disappointed with Sir Robert Scholey and his fellow directors, who had an equal share in the decision. They manifestly failed to produce the financial

case. If they have such a case, let them publish it so that we may see the figures on which they based their decision. I also hope that they may in the not-too-distant future give some guarantee about investment in the Dalzell plate mill, so that there can at least be some confidence over the future of that plant.

I hope that the directors also appreciate the knock-on effect of their decision on local industry and concerns further afield. I also hope that there may be some way to save part of the plant, as the hon. Member for Motherwell, South recommended. But if, reluctantly—and, I must say, with some anger—we must accept the British Steel decision, let us concentrate on the future and consider how we can turn an area of desperate trouble into a thriving economic region. In that context, I want to see some useful precedents used in the future.

This is not the first time that an area in this country or in America has run into a major economic disaster. We all remember the Tennessee Valley authority's great restoration plan before the war. The present situation, which has been signalled for a considerable time, has many similarities to the cases of Corby, Consett, Shotton, Barrow-in-Furness and perhaps even Cornish tin and some of the Welsh valleys. So we know what can happen in large-scale economic disasters and that we should set about trying to introduce new jobs and industries as soon as possible.

Whether the problem is on a large scale, such as the Ravenscraig closure, or on a small scale such as I faced in Sanquhar and Kirconnel way back in the 1960s when the coal mines closed, we must do everything possible to build advance factories and bring in new industries. Those do not provide a complete answer, but at least they provide jobs and help to make rapid progress.

I am glad that my right hon. Friend set up the Lanarkshire working group, which is now the Lanarkshire development agency, because it has been a great success. He must use every possible form of assistance available to him, whether it is the local enterprise company, Scottish Enterprise, Locate in Scotland or Industry in Scotland. We must look urgently at what each of those agencies can offer and they must be co-ordinated. I hope that they will be co-ordinated in the enterprise zone. That will be the key, as was shown in Corby. I hope that Sir Leon Brittan and Bruce Millan, if their responsibilities overlap, will do all they can to help us to achieve the enterprise zone as quickly as possible.

I was a little worried when my right hon. Friend mentioned—perhaps off the top of his head—500 acres. I should have thought that we would need a much more substantial area. I suspect that the Ravenscraig site measures more than 1,000 acres.

Dr. Bray: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will find that the Ravenscraig site is not even included in the enterprise zone.

Sir Hector Monro: I am glad to have that information. It worries me to an extent because of the future of the site, which I shall discuss in a moment.

I am also glad that the Secretary of State has been able to report success in attracting new industry to the area and that unemployment is now some 9,000 lower than it was four years ago. However, once we have that enterprise zone, it will need funding, leadership, speed and everyone working together—cross-party, local authorities, planning authorities—at top speed to bring to fruition the advantages of having an enterprise zone.

Geographically, the area is well placed, with motorways, the new Mossend rail depot, the main line, the airport not too far away and, most importantly, the skilled work force. With spirit and determination, there can be great advantages ahead, so that that work force, which must be extremely despondent at British Steel's announcement, can look confidently to the future.

We must also consider quality of life and the environment. That will be partly the responsibility of British Steel. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South expressed his view on that. I am interested that he feels that the Ravenscraig site should not be changed into an environmentally attractive area but should remain a possible steelworks for some time to come. It will be a big operation to bring in all the agencies and authorities if we are to convert a major steel works, with all its contamination and toxic waste problems, into a new environment. We shall need a major new environmental assessment.

It was reported in *The Scotsman* that the Lanarkshire development agency has called for and received such an assessment and therefore has a basis upon which to work. However, the site could generate both revenue and capital rather than become the liability that some people anticipate. Throughout the process, speed is the watchword. We have no time to waste if the plant is really to close in about six months' time. We must consider the repercussions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which comes into force next year, so that British Steel does not take a hasty decision to avoid responsibilities.

I am glad that it is the Secretary of State's responsibility to co-ordinate all those agencies and the enterprise zone to push people forward with spirit and determination to achieve the new industries and bring new jobs to the area that has been afflicted by British Steel's decision. It can be done if we all approach it constructively. Let us get on with it now.

8.25 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) about comparing this debate with that at the time of Gartcosh. Many people recognise, as the shop stewards did at the time, that the closure of Gartcosh was the beginning of the long road towards the end of the steel industry in Scotland. That is why they marched to London and some members of my party, not least councillor Jim Bannerman, took a prominent part in that march. Some Conservative Members who are still in the House did not exactly cover themselves with glory at that time. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) will confirm that members of the Select Committee sought to investigate the implications of Gartcosh but had some difficulty getting the Committee to agree to do so. We then had to suffer a filibuster from the hon. Members for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) in an attempt to prevent the report from being completed.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) should also mention the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), who made a gentleman's agreement with me at that time to vote with

[Mr. David Lambie]

the majority of the Committee but reneged on it. The hon. Gentleman sheds crocodile tears now, but he should have stood up and been counted then.

Mr. Bruce: I do not know about that, but the important point is that the problem has a long history and the people have seen it coming.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bruce: No; the hon. Gentleman will get his own chance to speak.

The workers at Ravenscraig have been seeking to mobilise opinion for years to try to ensure that the steel industry had a future in Scotland. At the time of Gartcosh, the Conservatives could have done something about it but they tried to deflect a genuine attempt to investigate the implications of that decision. When it came to privatisation, the Secretary of State explained on three or four occasions why the Government did not explore the option put forward by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) or some similar option to create a competitor to British Steel at the time of privatisation. Instead, the Government gave the limp and weak response that they had to suffer from the fact that the industry had been nationalised and, as usual, they tried to blame the previous Government. The reality is that the entire ideology of privatisation has been about privatising monopolies to maximise the price—and to hell with competition policy and the real strategic interests for the future of the industry and the economy.

Once the Government let that opportunity go and we knew that Bob Scholey, with his commitment, was to become chairman of British Steel, Ravenscraig's future was sealed.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is wrong on both counts. First, it was not a matter of not exploring. Our advisers and the Government explored and reached the conclusion that it was not possible to privatise a separate, viable Scottish industry. Had an attempt been made to do so, it would have disappeared in the present economic circumstances. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that all privatisation is monolithic. He need only look at Scottish Buses or Scottish Electricity.

Mr. Bruce: Those came a little later and certainly the record of the major privatisations is that competition has not been a prime motivation of the Government.

The Secretary of State has chosen his words carefully in terms of the kind of privatisation that is to be explored. Is he seriously suggesting that the only possible future for the steel industry in Britain is as a single monopoly? I find that a rather extraordinary claim from a party that claims to believe in a free enterprise system. He knows that he failed both the people of Scotland and the people of Britain, because his predecessor, while British Steel was still in public ownership, used his power to prevent the closing of Ravenscraig. As a result, British Steel was able to secure markets which it would have forgone if it had been free to make its own choice. The intervention that the right hon. Gentleman deplores, carried out by his predecessor, was beneficial to British Steel, to its shareholders, to the Scottish economy and to the British economy. So while he may not wish to second guess British Steel management, that management has been one of continuous retreat from market share, with the abandonment of markets to foreign competitors in a variety of areas. I regret to say that that appears to continue to be the strategy, to the detriment of the entire British economy.

Having got to where we are, the question that now arises is what is to be done to try to secure a future for the economy of Lanarkshire and west central Scotland as a result of this run-down and decline. We face a very serious situation. It would be helpful if the Government could give us a genuine, honest and detailed statement of exactly how much new money will be put into Lanarkshire when and if they secure the agreement of the European Community to the various measures being proposed, and if they will ensure that any additional money provided through the European Community will go to the people of Lanarkshire —rather than to the Treasury, as has been the Government's policy so far. I know that the Commissioner responsible has indicated that unless he gets that assurance from the Government he may not be able to secure that agreement from the Community.

With regard to the future of the steel industry in Scotland, I believe that all of us hope that any possible avenue which might lead to securing the future of the steel industry in Scotland should be explored and developed. That means the investment at Dalzell, of course, but also the potential for Hunterston to be the focus of a new steel industry in Scotland at some time in the future. It is still rated as one of the best deep-water sites in Europe and still seen to be a site which could be the focus of new investment. It seems to me that British Steel has shown itself unwilling to provide that investment, but it should not be in a position to prevent it.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to refer to Hunterston in the course of the debate. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Hunterston's potential is enormous. Hunterston must not be forgotten in this whole process. There must be every effort, involving Government, local authorities and all other parties, to try to get it right for Hunterston. I am sure that everyone would welcome as united an approach as possible on this.

Mr. Bruce: I echo what the hon. Gentleman has said. That is the right way forward.

The other question of great concern is the contribution that British Steel is likely to make to the reinstatement of the site. It has already been mentioned that the site will probably not be included in the enterprise zone. I hope that it will not. I believe that in the short run nobody will want to do anything with that site, if it is not to continue as a steelworks, until it has been thoroughly examined and reinstated. We have to get new jobs in the area quickly; we therefore want attractive areas in which people will want to invest, rather than places where people will be saddled with a whole range of problems. It is important that those two issues are kept separate.

In this connection, British Steel must co-operate fully in terms of making every bit of information that it has available to anybody and everybody who needs it for the purpose of reinstating the site. It is also important that British Steel should make a contribution which does not amount merely to a scorched-earth retreat. It must recognise that it has gained a great deal from the community of Lanarkshire, and that it has shown a

remarkable contempt for that community in not even being prepared to meet the work force through all the years that this battle has been going on. I am talking specifically of top management, though not necessarily the middle management. It would be helpful if the Government could indicate just what measures they are prepared to take to secure a real contribution from British Steel on those fronts.

The suggestion that there is any easy, quick fix which can resolve this matter has already been addressed. A solution cannot be plucked out of the air. I have already indicated that there were moments in the past when we might have secured it. We should still explore the options. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South has indicated some of the ways in which we might move forward, and I hope that they will be explored. Nobody wants a situation in which this misery is dragged out to the point where false hopes are maintained only to be dashed again. The community has to lift its eyes to a future that will last.

The suggestion that somehow or other simply nationalising the plant could solve all the problems is a mean one. It does not change anything fundamentally about the reality of the situation. While the European Community might allow nationalisation to take place, the notion that it would do so without very serious scrutiny of the motivation, mechanisms and financial implications is one out of cloud-cuckoo-land. The go-ahead that has been given for the French plant has been on the basis of four months' thorough investigation by independent Swiss auditors, with everything held on ice while it is being carried out and with major protests now coming from Spain and Germany at the Commission's allowing it to go ahead.

It will therefore not be possible to take the steelworks over on the cheap, because that would be anti-competitive and contrary to the Community terms. If it were taken over, the question to be asked would be whether it was really the best use of public money, even for the people of Lanarkshire. I would like to ask the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), if he were here—I choose him specifically because his constituency is next to mine—whether he really thinks that the people of Banff and Buchan, with the hon. Member as Prime Minister, would necessarily regard £200 million to nationalise a steel plant in Lanarkshire as the best way to spend the Scottish taxpayers' money. The answer is that they probably would if they were absolutely sure that this would save those jobs permanently and create an industry that would last, but if it would only lead to tears two years later, they might well ask whether the money could not have been invested in a way that would better have secured the future of the economy of Lanarkshire.

It is important that the people of Scotland focus on how they would make such decisions if those decisions were under their own control, rather than simply blaming the Government and British Steel management for the way they have failed the people of Scotland so far, on which there is wide agreement.

It must be accepted that the community of Motherwell and the surrounding area wants recognition of what it has done and the responsibility that it has undertaken. The hon. Member for Motherwell, South gave a moving testimony to the people he represents. He has illustrated far more fully than I could what British Steel certainly owes to that community, and what the people of Scotland and of Britain also owe to that community, which has conducted itself with considerable dignity and intelligence. That has been recognised by the overwhelming majority of people throughout Britain. Indeed, in a leader in the *Financial Times*, which unfortunately does not have a very wide circulation, it is indicated that that community deserves the very best that we can give it. I hope that some rather less sanguine organs south of the border may read that message and accept that at the end of the day the work force and community of north Lanarkshire deserve the kind of investment that will secure the long-term future for them and their children.

I wish to stress—as I have on numerous occasions, although I have not had the right answers yet—the role which I believe that the new town development corporations can play in this. It remains a fact that the Government intend to wind up the new towns. I accept the argument that they have been successful and that their role is coming to an end, but the expertise which exists in those new towns has attracted to Scotland investment which would not have come to Britain at all but for that expertise. We should redeploy that expertise to give the people involved the opportunity to attract new investment to the new sites in other parts of Lanarkshire. I do not mean just to advise; they need power and authority, and the kind of organisation that they have had in the new town development corporations. I urge the Government to look again at how that can be done. We should not be stealing jobs from other parts of Scotland or the United Kingdom but attracting mobile investment which might otherwise go elsewhere in the Community or to Japan or north America. That seems to me to be a worthwhile aim. We should not give up the expertise that we have at the very moment when we need it most. It would be an extraordinarily foolish Government who did not recognise the case for redeploying that expertise.

This has been a long debate—it has been going on for years. In many ways, I hope that it will not continue for many more, but that there will be hope and a future. No one can suggest that there are easy answers. We need co-operation involving all sorts of organisations—ultimately, across political parties and between Government, local authorities and the public and private sectors. We must put the machinery in place. The people of Lanarkshire deserve the best. If we cannot give them such co-operation, we shall have failed them.

8.40 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): As ever, the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) demonstrated to the House the great depth of his knowledge of the industry and the fact that he genuinely cares about those who sent him here. He is a credit to them and to his party. Anything that I may say in no way reflects on him or on the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid). During my time in the House, both of them have fought valiantly for those they represent.

I wish that I could say the same of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who makes the most appalling accusations. He suggested that I had behaved wrongly in relation to the Select Committee inquiry into Gartcosh. My views and my position are on record, and I stand by them today. I did not behave dishonourably in insisting that the report reflected the evidence given to the Committee. The final report did just that, so I cannot see how I behaved badly.

Mr. Lambie: The hon. Gentleman said that he did not behave dishonourably. I accept that he was one of the few Tory members of the Select Committee who stuck to his view, which was that he was not in favour of giving any help to Gartcosh. That is certainly correct. That was not the case with the other Conservative Members, some of whom behaved dishonourably and let us down.

Mr. Walker: You, Madam Deputy Speaker, would not expect me to respond to that appalling statement. The hon. Gentleman accuses me of one thing and then accuses my colleagues of another. The plain truth is that he was rumbled, and he did not like it.

This is both a good day and a sad day for Scotland —the day of Yarrow and Ravenscraig. Earlier, we had the good news that the order for three frigates for the Royal Navy has gone to Yarrow. That order allowed the privatised yard—something that the hon. Member for Gordon seems to have forgotten—to retain its design team and so continue in competition in the world market.

That was made possible because, under a Conservative Government, there is a substantial home market for military hardware, and steel is important in military hardware. Such a home market would not have existed under a socialist Labour Government at Westminster or a socialist nationalist Government in Edinburgh. The lesson is that private sector competition and a substantial home market allow even specialist industries such as warship building to compete in world markets. I hope that we shall not forget that lesson when we discuss other matters.

I congratulate the work force and shop stewards of Ravenscraig. For the past eight years, they have been nothing less than magnificent. They have removed restrictive practices and broken all production records. Today, they are paying the terrible price for world over-capacity in steel-making and the lack of demand. They are also paying the price, I believe, for the mistakes made by politicians—in the location of the plant so far from the deep-water port of Hunterston—and it is right and proper that Hunterston should come into our considerations. They are also paying the price for the failure of the European Community to deal quickly and effectively with such matters as the Spanish steel subsidy and also for the world recession. All those factors have brought about the present situation.

The workers of Ravenscraig deserve better. If the proposals of the hon. Member for Motherwell, South are not realised—I sincerely hope that they can be—the workers are right to demand good redundancy terms and special assistance to the area, to create an environment in which new enterprises and jobs can be created.

I believe that it is right—it is a principle from which I will not deviate—that management decisions must be made by the management of companies. I also believe in the private sector. Consequently, I support the right of British Steel to make the decision that it has made, painful though it may be. British Steel should, however, explain —I believe it has a moral duty to do so—why it has made that decision.

Following its promise to keep the plant open until 1994, that moral responsibility is enormous. British Steel ought to explain in detail the grounds on which the decision has been made. That is the very least that it can do for its work force, given the way in which that work force has responded over the years to the demands placed upon it.

Similarly, those who are looking to the Government to intervene have a duty to spell out exactly what they would do with their intervention within what is possible under EC restraints and rules and within the constraints of the marketplace as it stands today. They must spell out clearly how much it would cost and explain who will pay in a manner that can be understood.

The two articles in today's *Glasgow Herald* address the realities of the situation and do a fair demolition job on the nationalist party's simplistic, non-viable, opportunist proposals. The socialist nationalists have learnt nothing from the failure of collectivism and state industry in eastern Europe. Their behaviour in the Usher hall last Saturday was a vivid demonstration of what narrow nationalism is really like.

Socialist nationalism is the worst form of nationalism. I am reminded that, between the French revolution and the first world war, narrow nationalism was the cause of most of Europe's wars. I am also reminded that, between 1930 and 1945, socialist nationalism almost destroyed Europe.

Ravenscraig and Scotland do not want narrow socialist nationalism—nor do we want any further examples of the Fuhrer-like superior attitudes, tendencies and characteristics of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). Those, coupled with Goebbels-type misinformation about saving the steel works, will be rejected by the workers at Ravenscraig and by the Scots at the general election. They have been exposed by the *Glasgow Herald* today and will be rumbled by the people of Scotland at the election.

This is a sad day for the people of Motherwell, but I hope that it can also be the beginning of a new dawn for them; they certainly deserve it.

8.49 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Monklands is an important part of Lanarkshire. Strathkelvin includes Gartcosh, which almost every hon. Member speaking in this debate has mentioned. I would be less than human if I were not to say that I am disappointed by the signals that I have been getting that I should speak for only five minutes. However, out of respect for my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who has made such a contribution to our debates on steel, I shall confine myself to five minutes.

I wish, in the very brief time available to me, to make four points. I am sorry that the Secretary of State is no longer on the Front Bench. If anything summarises the supine, do-nothing approach to steel, it is the timetable leading up to the announcement which the Secretary of State confirmed in the House tonight. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) the Secretary of State, from a sedentary position, confirmed that, although he knew on 20 December that this closure would take place, the only action he took between then and 9 January, when the other place resumed, was to make application for an enterprise zone. *[Interruption.]* I am going by what the Secretary of State told the House. Although I have only five minutes, I am willing to give way to the Minister.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not knowingly mislead the House. He must know that the Secretary of State wrote immediately

to demand a meeting with Sir Robert Scholey and his colleagues before the board meeting at which the decision was taken. Of course, that meeting with Sir Robert was held.

Mr. Clarke: The Minister's intervention takes absolutely nothing from my general point. The Secretary of State ought to recognise that either he has power or he does not have power. There is a very clear precedent. His predecessor as Secretary of State—the right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind)—came to the House and made a statement when the hot mills were closed. Whereas the current Secretary of State has not found it possible to criticise British Steel, the right hon. and learned Member for Pentlands made it absolutely plain that he was opposed to British Steel's position.

The present Secretary of State's weak and mealy-mouthed response on this issue is entirely unacceptable. *[Interruption.]* It looks as though the Under-Secretary would like me to give way again. If I had time to do so, I would. If the hon. Gentleman is to be fair, he will allow me, as the Member representing the much-mentioned Gartcosh, another two and a half minutes to say a word or two about something we happen to know about. During the Gartcosh episode, we warned, both in the Select Committee and in the Chamber—indeed, we warned again and again and again—that, if the cold mill was closed, it would be a matter of time until Ravenscraig too would go, and that is what has happened.

There has been a search for scapegoats. We are told that there are several problems, one of which is that there is not a finishing plant. But that is the result of a Government decision, supported by the House. Obviously, privatisation weakened our position. In the case of Scottish Power, where there was not even a Scottish dimension, privatisation was not the same, but that too was the result of a Government decision endorsed by the Conservative majority, and we in Lanarkshire are now paying the price.

Then we were told by British Steel and the Government that this had something to do with profits. We were told that British Steel's profit would go down from £307 million to £19 million. Whose fault is that? Is there not a recession? Do the Government not have something to do with it? Did we not warn that if we did not have the necessary investment in manufacturing industry and training, and the necessary investment in Lanarkshire, this was inevitable?

Despite the unacceptable brevity of this debate, the people in my constituency are left with a number of problems. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary's sedentary interruptions are not helping one iota. Let him go to Gartcosh and see things for himself.

I hope that it does not signal what we shall see at Ravenscraig, given that British Steel tells us that it will cost £200 million to clear the site. At Gartcosh, we have a derelict site, with not a job in sight. Despite the promises of 1985-86, the paper recycling plant has not got off the ground. This is the result of the Government's economic policy, in addition to what they did to Gartcosh.

I want to end with a plea. Even today there is a case for a fight for what remains of the steel industry in Lanarkshire. Even today we have to consider the Ravenscraig closure's implications for 149 firms in Monklands itself, as well as for the Mossend freightliner depot, about which the Government today, yet again, told us so proudly.

This decision is a major blow to the infrastructure of Lanarkshire and the matter will not end with this debate. The Scottish people reserve the right to make their comments, and I believe that they will do so. This decision was made inevitable by weak, supine men—men who do not match the steel of the steelworkers of Lanarkshire—but let it be clear that, when the election is held in a few weeks' time, just as the Conservatives have manifestly deserted Scotland, the people of Scotland will desert them.

8.55 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) for making time for me. One of the tragedies of debates of this kind is that, although they should be held in Government time, they are not. After all, the Government are the guilty men. In addition, we could do without juvenile interventions such as we had earlier from the young Back-Bench Conservative Member wearing the red tie—I refer to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim). Apparently he has gone back to his nursery, as he does on such occasions, having made one or two interventions. Conservative Members obviously have no interest in this matter, nor have they shown any for the past five years.

What has happened at Ravenscraig is a tragedy. "Tragedy" is a word that the sophisticated leader-writers do not like us to use. They have said that it is a word that we Scots take out of the bottom drawer on such occasions. They do not believe that we know its meaning. Well, Ravenscraig is a tragedy in the classical sense. It is the unfolding story of men and women, not eminently good or bad, but decent and dignified, fighting against almost insurmountable odds and eventually being overpowered by powers outside their own persuasion or dictation. Perhaps, before so easily dismissing Scottish Members of Parliament as bawling illiterates, the leader-writers of the London and southern English press should consider the story of Ravenscraig.

Tonight the Secretary of State used a wonderful euphemism when he told us that it was inevitable that there would be "some contraction". The Secretary of State regards the closure, the industrial murder of Ravenscraig as "some contraction". I have no personal ill-feeling towards the Secretary of State, who appears to have departed for the moment, but tonight he performed in the most oily fashion that I have seen any Secretary of State display. That was in contrast not just with his predecessors, including the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), who is with us tonight and who was at least prepared to fight, to answer honest criticism and even at one stage to put his office at stake; it was in marked contrast also with the dignified contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray).

The word "inevitable" which the Secretary of State used today typified the attitude of the Conservative party over the past few years. The closure of Ravenscraig was never inevitable. I do not want to dwell on the past tonight, but we need to understand the past to understand where we are, and we need to understand where we are to understand the alternatives for the future.

[Dr. John Reid]

There is no integrated modern steel plant in the world that does not have two essential components: a steel-making side and a finishing side, a hot and cold mill. That is patently obvious to anyone who knows anything about the steel industry. Yet in a cold, calculated fashion British Steel went ahead, at best with Government collusion, at worst with Government connivance, and on occasion with encouragement from the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) over Gartcosh, to deprive the Ravenscraig plant of one half of its essential elements—the finishing side.

In 1985-86 British Steel closed the Ravenscraig cold mill at Gartcosh. In 1990, it closed the hot mill. Simultaneously it refused to invest in the blast furnaces, running the plant down to a one-blast furnace operation. There were two consequences of that cold, clinical action. First, it left what remained of Ravenscraig on 7 January this year completely dependent on other plants inside British Steel for its finishing operation. Secondly, the action ensured that if Ravenscraig were removed from British Steel it would be left as a producer of raw slab steel only, without a finishing side and requiring massive investment for it to be brought back to being a viable and integrated plant.

We start from here, not from where we want to be, and I shall return to this idea later when considering some of the proposed options. For the present, I put it on record that the Government were well aware that the emasculation of one half—the vital half—of the Ravenscraig steel plant was under way.

The Government were warned six years ago almost to the day, on 8 January 1986, by those of us who marched from Gartcosh to London to bring the matter to the attention of the Prime Minister, who, as I recall, was too busy to meet those of us who had walked 400 miles. She was having tea with Ian Botham. The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) mentioned that tonight, and full credit to him for his support on that occasion.

The Government ignored the warnings. They were continually warned at the time of privatisation, especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South, that if British Steel was privatised as a single unit monopoly, that would inevitably lead to the closure of Ravenscraig. This was the last chance, yet the Government ignored the warnings. We pleaded with them, asking them to allow the privatisation of a separate unit of Ravenscraig, of the plate mill at Dalzell and of the finishing works at Shotton.

The Secretary of State told us tonight that on that occasion he voted against a separate Scottish steel industry. Not only did he reject the idea, therefore, but he did not even understand what was being proposed. No one was asking him—apart from the Scottish National party—for a separate Scottish steel industry. We were asking the Secretary of State for a unit that included the steelmaking at Ravenscraig, the finishing side at Shotton and the plate mill. The Government rejected that and ignored our arguments. The tragedy was that, although the idea had the support of the Liberals, the Labour party, Motherwell district council, Strathclyde region, the campaign for the steel industry and the Ravenscraig shop stewards, the only people who opposed that last chance to save Ravenscraig as a viable unit—apart, that is, from the Government—were members of the SNP. Indeed, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said on Third Reading of the relevant Bill that his party opposed the idea, presumably because Shotton was not in Scotland. What a way to make a decision of such importance for the industry!

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): If the hon. Gentleman checks the record, he will find that I voted for the RSD option, despite the fact that I was arguing for a separate Scottish steel industry. He may also care to recall that he did not even carry his Front-Bench spokesmen with him in supporting that option.

Dr. Reid: That is not true and the hon. Gentleman should withdraw that remark. We had discussions throughout with the people involved, and we carried our Front-Bench spokesmen with us. As so often, the hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Although I wish the Dalzell workers well, I must point out that, tragically, the only other people who opposed the idea were the shop stewards at Dalzell, even though it was the last chance to save Ravenscraig. We remember that now, when the SNP proposes keeping the Dalzell works and Ravenscraig without a finishing side at Shotton.

As I say, the Government ignored our warnings, and on occasion we have been bereft of support from others. What is to be done now? The Government say that there is nothing to be done. That is typical of their attitude over the past few years. For all their posturing and posing, the word was given out by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when refusing to meet the shadow Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Trade and Industry. Three days ago he said:

"Ravenscraig shows the folly of political intervention in commercial decisions".

There you have it. For the Tories, Ravenscraig is not an industrial tragedy; it is and always has been a political folly. Despite the posturing, that is what has underlain their words.

But if we have a "do nothing" Government, we are not helped by a "promise everything" Opposition in the person of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. It is a tragedy that we have been diverted from the main possible alternative to save steelmaking by the fantasies that have been put forward for political reasons by the hon. Member. I have to spend some time tonight going through them because they are deluding some people—not many in Motherwell, I may add, but the less one knows about steelmaking the more attractive those proposals sound.

I should like to spend some time on the plans—there have been more than one. The first, in the immediate aftermath of the closure announcement, was to nationalise and restore Ravenscraig, presumably as a Scottish competitor to Port Talbot and Llanwern. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan shakes his head. It was not he who made it; it was the steel spokesman who spends all the money apparently, Mr. Lawson. To the Ravenscraig shop stewards who knew the plant and industry better than anyone, the plan was sheer fantasy.

It will be obvious from what I have said already that the proposition would require vast expenditure. The purchase price of the plant, £50 million to reline the blast furnaces, £650 million for a cold mill, £750 million for a hot mill and £100 million for other necessary investment, such as coke ovens and blast furnaces, came to a total of about £1,700 million. The Scottish National party has never disputed

that figure. It has said that it cannot be realistic because the share value is greater than that. I have to say to the right hon. Member for Ayr that, in his new job as chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland, one of the first things to do is to make sure that the economists he employs know the difference between share value and capital value, because it is obvious from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan that not all of them have done in the past.

Plan 2 came 48 hours later. When the Scottish National party found out the actual cost, it dropped the plan to reinstate Ravenscraig. It suddenly announced—again, Mr. Lawson in a radio broadcast with me and after a telephone conversation with the shop stewards at the Clydesdale works, who informed me about it, I am afraid—that the new plan was to nationalise Clydesdale. Clydesdale had been closed eight months earlier, but presumably then the Scottish Nationalists were committed to refitting the mills at Clydesdale. This would cost another £150 million. They threw in Clydebridge and Dalzell at the same time.

Plan 3 was on the Sunday, because the cavalry came over the hill in the form of the Dalzell shop stewards. They gave them a plan which was perhaps new to the Scottish National party—it was certainly not new to the Ravenscraig shop stewards, who had been offered it for three years and had tossed it aside as unrealistic. Plan 3 is the one that they stick to now. It promises to restore Ravenscraig as a producer sending 1 million tonnes of slab to the Dalzell plate mill, and proposes the building of a new pipe mill at another site in Motherwell, the cost of which varies between £150 million and £250 million. We will not quibble about that: different people make different analyses.

There is absolutely nothing new in the proposal. It has been considered and consistently rejected by those who know the industry—above all, the steel workers at Ravenscraig. But for the sake of fairness to the SNP—because, as hon. Members know, I am a fair man—let us assume that this £250 million is not in addition to the £2,000 million already spent by Mr. Lawson. If we were to assume that it was in addition, at the present rate of daily expenditure announced by the Scottish National party steel spokesman, by my calculations that party would have spent the entire budget of an imaginary Scottish government by St. Valentine's day this year.

Let us even assume, for the sake of argument, that costs for Ravenscraig and a new Dalzell pipe mill are accurate. The problem with the SNP nationalisation plan 3 is neither dogmatic nor ideological; it is that it is still wholly unrealistic. Let us look at just some of the criticisms. First, it assumes that a two-blast furnace operation at Ravenscraig would be viable at a production level of 1 million tonnes. Wrong. As the work force, economists and industrialists will tell the SNP, the viability figure of Ravenscraig is nearer 2 million tonnes.

Secondly, if Ravenscraig is to produce the necessary 2 million tonnes to make it a viable unit and Dalzell is to take a supposed 1 million tonnes on the plate mill, what is to be done with the extra 1 million tonnes of raw slab from Ravenscraig? Give it to charity? Perhaps give it out in Leningrad along with the butter? It certainly cannot be sold.

Thirdly, what makes the SNP think that Dalzell can take 1 million tonnes from Ravenscraig? In the best years, 1988-89 and 1989-90, it took only about 350,000 tonnes a year. How will the SNP suddenly triple the amount that can be taken by Dalzell?

Fourthly, the SNP assumes a massive, easy and open market in the North sea. Of course, no figures are given, so I bothered to check on the latest figures. The total market for the United Kingdom sector in the North sea in the past year—which was not a bad year—was 274,000 tonnes, roughly 25 per cent. of what will pass through Dalzell's plate mill. Of that 274,000 tonnes, only 71,000 tonnes was plate. Much of it was in seamless tubes, light gauge plate, which are not produced in Scotland—unless the SNP intends to reopen the Clydesdale works and spend £250 million on that mill.

Fifthly, is the SNP aware that the maximum length of Dalzell plate production is 23 m while the modern market demands 50 m plate? Even if money were invested to meet that requirement, the layout of the Dalzell plant is such that, to get the extra length, the plant would have to be turned at right angles. Do SNP members propose to turn it at right angles? If they do, have they told Bishop Joe Devine, because they would need to knock down Motherwell cathedral?

Sixthly, does the SNP think that it would be commercially competitive to produce steel at Ravenscraig at 1,500 deg, cool it and load it on a lorry, transport it to Dalzell, unload it and put it in the plate mill, heat it again to reduce it to plate, cool it and load it on a lorry, transport it to the new pipe mill that it proposes to build somewhere else, unload it from the lorry, place it in the pipe mill, bend it, put it on a lorry and send it to the customer? If the SNP thinks that that is a viable scenario to compete with others in the market, its view of competition is different from mine.

I shall not go into detail on the challenge to me about what Labour would do, but I shall deal with it quickly. First, we would insist that British Steel maintains the plant for sale on the market. *[Interruption.]* One of the ways is to make British Steel aware that £200 million in reclamation charges are hanging over its head if it does not play ball with the Government. Secondly, Government resources must be used in the search for a buyer. It should not be left to British Steel. Why are not the embassies and the Department of Trade and Industry making efforts to sell it? The third course of action is to do what my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South has been doing, which is single-handedly to investigate thin-slab casting. It is amazing that the Government, with all their resources, are sending someone along with an Opposition Member to the United States to study an issue that they should have been studying long ago.

Finally, it should be made absolutely plain to any potential buyer that the Government would be prepared, if necessary, to intervene financially in a joint venture. That matter has been discussed with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who is at one with the Ravenscraig shop stewards. Eighteen months ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) pledged to make finance available to develop it.

I thank the shop stewards and the representatives of the workers at Ravenscraig. With three possible exceptions, the message from all hon. Members to those shop stewards is: "Do not think that you are demeaned or belittled when you are attacked by lesser men." It is the easiest thing in the world to take workers into a struggle that they cannot win and then to wash one's hands and say, "We did not sell out." It is harder to lead with honesty. The Ravenscraig shop stewards made it plain at the beginning of the campaign that they would never make a promise that they

[Dr. Reid]

could not keep, never make a pledge that they would not strive to maintain, and never make a claim that they could not justify. They have done us proud. The Labour party will adopt those three slogans, as it has in the past. We shall continue to fight for steel. We shall not make promises that we cannot keep or pledges that are fantasy, and we shall not exploit the workers in our area for our political advancement. The Ravenscraig stewards have done it, we have done it and the people of Motherwell, Lanarkshire and Scotland generally will recognise it and support us for doing exactly what the stewards did.

9.14 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) on his devastating analysis of the interventionist policies of the Scottish National party. Just as those policies are madcap, so are the interventionist policies of the hon. Gentleman's own party. I look forward to his being equally critical of some of the policies put forward by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) from time to time.

This has been a good day for Scotland. Earlier today, the Secretary of State for Defence was able to announce that Yarrow is getting the order for three frigates. That will guarantee employment at the Yarrow yard for a substantial time. There was some snide comment that it was a political decision—and it was, of course, because the size of the defence budget is a political decision.

If the defence budget were cut by one third, as the Labour party advocates, there would be no orders for frigates at Yarrow today. If the defence budget were cut by 50 per cent., as the Liberal Democrats suggest, there would perhaps be no Scottish regiments left, and there would certainly be no orders for Yarrow. It is hypocritical of the Liberal party to go round Kincardineshire saying that it is against the removal of the regiments and that it supports orders for Scotland when it wants to halve the defence budget.

We have had an interesting debate. We heard the shadow Secretary of State announce that nationalisation was a slogan put forward by those with no expectation of power. I shall remember that when the Labour party says that it intends to nationalise the water industry. The people of Scotland are being told by the SNP that British Steel assets in Scotland should be nationalised to preserve jobs. Did nationalisation ever preserve jobs on the railways? Has it preserved jobs in British Coal? Did it preserve jobs in the shipbuilding industry? Of course it did not. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about Rolls-Royce?"] Hon. Members who intervene from a sedentary position should realise that the prosperity of companies like Rolls-Royce will be better guaranteed in the private sector than ever it would be in the public sector.

The lesson of Ravenscraig is that it provides a cautionary tale for those politicians who think that they can buck the market indefinitely. The lesson of Ravenscraig, Bathgate and Linwood for the Scottish people is:

"Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes."

It casts doubt on those politicians who say that they can bring 5,000, 10,000 or 15,000 jobs to Scotland overnight.

The speech of the shadow Secretary of State was, as usual, very loquacious. He was happy to pour words on troubled waters, but he could not produce a policy that would create or save one job at Ravenscraig.

The most dishonest policy in respect of Ravenscraig comes from the Scottish National party. If it were campaigning for an independent Scotland within Europe, how would it expect that country to solve the problem of Ravenscraig? The European Community would not stop the SNP nationalising Ravenscraig, but it would tell the SNP that it could not carry on subsidising Ravenscraig once it had nationalised it. It is in order for a private company to run a plant at a loss, but for the state permanently to subsidise an industry would be against the rules of the European Community. The Scottish National party knows that an independent Scotland within the European Community could not run Ravenscraig at an indefinite loss. It is trying to con the people of Scotland, and particularly of Ravenscraig, by pretending that it could save the plant by nationalising it. It is putting forward a misleading campaign. It knows that it is a misleading campaign.

Similarly the Labour party is putting forward a misleading campaign. That is why the Opposition chose to have only a half-day debate on Ravenscraig. They have frozen out some of their colleagues by having only a half-day debate. They also chose to hold it in the second half of a Thursday when they know that most members of the press who would realise that they are using merely empty words have gone home.

The long-term prosperity of Lanarkshire and Scotland will not be guaranteed by shoring up loss-making industries and indulging in quill pen economics. Prosperity will come only by encouraging profitable, dynamic industries to come to Scotland. Lanarkshire has many attractions for industry. It has a well-recognised, well-respected labour force and good communications. It will be unbeatable as an enterprise zone. I hope that Commissioner Millan, who has done so much to restrict money coming to areas of high unemployment in the United Kingdom, will do nothing to stop an enterprise zone being created in Lanarkshire.

9.20 pm

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): When the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who sat down to great cheers from his supporters, reads what he said tomorrow in the cold light of day, I do not believe that he will feel as happy as he did a few moments ago. What we got from him, tragically, was a comprehensive rubbishing of the Dalzell plant. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members are unhappy, but they will have to listen. I intend to continue until I have finished my speech.

Although the hon. Gentleman's supporters clapped and cheered, one of the things that they have to understand is that his argument against the Ravenscraig-Dalzell link up—

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sillars: No.

Dr. Reid *rose*——

Mr. Sillars: Sit down. The hon. Gentleman made fun of steel passing backwards and forwards—*[Interruption.]*

Dr. Reid: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) does not intend to give way, so he has the Floor.

Dr. Reid: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order that the Chair can deal with.

Dr. Reid: When I went to give my notes to *Hansard*, as requested, I understand that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) referred to me. In those circumstances, is it not the convention and would it not be courteous for the hon. Gentleman to give way to me so that I can correct what was a lie? I did not refer to the steel workers at Dalzell——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. First, I will ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his phrase "a lie." Then I can deal with his point of order.

Dr. Reid: I meant, of course, that it was an untruth.

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is up to the hon. Member for Govan, who has the Floor, to decide whether to give way. He appears not to be doing so. He must therefore be allowed to continue with his speech.

Mr. Sillars: That was the first of the Freudian slips that were made by the hon. Member for Motherwell, North. I never mentioned the workers or the shop stewards at Dalzell. I said that he had rubbished the plant at Dalzell.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Oh, no.

Mr. Sillars: Does not the stupid Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) understand——

Mr. Foulkes: Why does not the hon. Gentleman stand against me and have a go at the next election?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This has been a very well conducted debate so far. We are now coming towards the end of the debate and we want a proper winding up. Let us listen to all those hon. Members who want to speak.

Mr. Sillars: As I was saying, and as I intend to say, this stupid man here does not understand that, if we rubbish a plant, we damage its future standing in the minds of the policy makers who have to decide its future.

One of the tragedies of the first phase of the Ravenscraig closure was the comprehensive rubbishing of the Ravenscraig plant—*[Interruption.]* Then they said——

Dr. Reid: By *The Sun*.

Mr. Sillars: Opposition Members who have been——

Dr. Reid: You are the paymaster.

Mr. Sillars: You people who have been——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I can hear only one hon. Member at a time—*[Interruption.]* Order. I cannot hear myself think this evening. Will hon. Members please come to order? Mr. Sillars.

Mr. Sillars: We are taking no lectures from folk who, for a long time, were in political bed with that crook, Bob Maxwell.

The great tragedy of the first phase was the rubbishing of the Ravenscraig plant. How is it possible to say thereafter, "We should like somebody to come along and buy a plant that we have just rubbished"? Every speech that I have heard tonight from a Labour Member has been towards the compelling logic of the public ownership of the steel industry.

Dr. Reid: What?

Mr. Sillars: Oh yes. Opposition Members have kept saying, "We could press British Steel, but everybody knows that that is a waste of time." The hon. Member for Motherwell, North said, "Let someone take Scottish assets into private ownership and we will join in a joint venture"; but why not take Scottish assets into public ownership and then be open to a joint venture with a private organisation later? Their compelling logic is certain. We all know that what we have had from British Steel has been the malevolent exercise of monopolistic power in the private sector. The standard socialist answer to such power is to take it into public ownership—not to allow that malevolent power to dominate strategic industries and communities.

The hon. Member for Motherwell, North said, "We don't like to make promises that we canna keep." So let me ask him about the promise that was made on 23 February 1988, when his hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said:

"for the reasons that I have yet to develop fully, Opposition Members and the trade union movement strongly believe that the steel industry is most appropriately owned in a form of public ownership. We shall decide that form and the order of priorities by which it is to be secured when we return to power"—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1988; Vol. 128, c. 184.]

What about the priorities now in Lanarkshire? The hon. Gentleman's priorities now are to take British Steel's assets in Scotland out of the grip of the board of British Steel, that being the only guarantee of preserving jobs and the Scottish steel industry in Lanarkshire.

The hon. Members for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and for Motherwell, North have said, "Look at the nonsense of the £1·7 billion compared to the price of the shares on the stock exchange today." Do they not understand that, if I say to somebody, "I should like you to spend £1·7 billion buying our plant", that person is likely to reply, "I would buy your plant only if I wanted access to certain markets, but I can get the whole of British Steel, including the assets of your plant, wholly and totally for only £1·3 billion and, as a matter of fact, if I want control, I do not need to spend £1·3 billion, I need to spend only £700 million"—

Dr. Reid: Let us suppose that that mythical chap did come along and that the share value stayed at its current level—because it was known that there was a buyer, it might double or even treble—but let us suppose that, against all the evidence from the history of the market, the share value remained static. The buyer would still have to spend £1·7 billion on top of the share value simply to make it productive.

Mr. Sillars: As I understand the hon. Gentleman's account, the strip mill is still there. He included it in the £1·7 billion. He has the same economic adviser and calculator as Alf Young of the *Glasgow Herald*.

I want to argue that the best way to save the Scottish steel industry is to take all British Steel's assets in Scotland

[Mr. Sillars]

into public ownership. The thing to do is to captialise on the reprieve for Dalzell because Dalzell is the key to the retention of the base of the Scottish steel industry, on which base we could rebuild the industry.

If folk say to me, "Where did you invent that 1 million tonnes stuff?", I will tell them that it is from a report produced for Labour Strathclyde region by the department of political economy at Glasgow university in February 1990. It said:

"The Dalzell plant currently takes about 25 per cent. of Ravenscraig's production."

Later, on page 23, it makes a good point. This is endorsed by Labour Strathclyde region. The report says:

"Ravenscraig's product range is ideal for supplying a large plate mill."

We are talking about a 1-million-tonne mill.

"It has developed special techniques for ingot production for thick plate applications and has a casting capacity of 1·9 million tonnes per annum which can be flexibly switched between slab and strip production to suit market sentiment."

It went on to argue that the configuration between Ravenscriag and Dalzell was suited to the market that is now developing. It described the market as a fragmented, demand-led market, where people might demand a smaller tonnage of steel but wanted highly specialised steel and special products. The report argued eloquently that that configuration would meet market circumstances in the years that lay ahead. So that is the argument on which we have founded our case—an argument produced by Glasgow university and endorsed by Strathclyde regional council.

At the root of the matter lies this issue. There will be a 100-million-tonne plate mill with a pipe mill attached thereto, with a steel supplier up front. The question is whether it goes to Teesside or Lanarkshire, because the potential of the Scottish steel industry as we conceive it is exactly the same as British Steel conceives it. It would do what we ask today if the cash position was better than it is. That is the key factor. The only way to guarantee that the mill goes to Lanarkshire is to take the assets into public ownership. If the Labour party was worth its socialist salt, it would agree with me 100 per cent. of the way.

It is remarkable to hear Labour Member after Labour Member complain about the misapplication of private power but not follow the ideological guidance system and say that that private power must be curbed by the application of public power to take those assets into public control. They remind me of the ditty: "The people's flag is now mauve in hue. No longer red, it is turning a contemptible blue".

9.33 pm

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I am grateful for the chance to speak briefly at the end of this extremely important debate for my constituents and for people in many other parts of Scotland.

I begin by quoting the *Financial Times*. The Secretary of State for Scotland chose to give a quotation from it earlier. I shall come to that in a moment. First, I should like to quote a section of an editorial which appeared in that prestigious newspaper on 9 January. It is quoted in the document given to me and to many other hon. Members by my friend and constituent Rev. John Potter, the industrial chaplain to Lanarkshire who has done so much during the period of the rundown of the great steel industry to comfort the people that he serves and to campaign on their behalf. The words that he quoted are worth listening to because the *Financial Times* played such a marginal part in the Secretary of State's speech.

The editorial stated:

"The only other thing to be written in the Ravenscraig epitaph is that there was never a community more deserving of EC and UK Government help in rebuilding its local economy. Ravenscraig's work force has been loyal, hardworking and as efficient as the plant permitted. It has every right to expect politicians to move whatever bureaucratic obstacles stand in the way of measures to stimulate the creation of jobs in industries more suited to the periphery of Europe."

I hope that the Secretary of State will pay as much attention to that as he did to his selective quotation. So much was made of that quotation that I wish to direct the House's attention to the rest of it, which the Secretary of State did not choose to point out.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, in response to a question put by the *Financial Times* about sectoral intervention, taking steel as an example:

"it isn't intervention that the steel industry needs. What the steel industry needs is a more vibrant domestic market, specially in the manufacturing sector and a chance therefore to make even further increases in their productivity and be more competitive in difficult international markets."

If the Secretary of State agreed with the part that he quoted, does he agree that the Government have supervised a Scottish and a British economy which has created the conditions in which the steel plants of Scotland and of Britain are in such trouble?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman's attention must have wandered. Had he been in the Chamber throughout my speech, he would have heard me read precisely that part of the quotation which he has just quoted and which I endorsed.

Mr. Robertson: It was a selective quotation, underscored, missing out the key component that the people of Lanarkshire and Scotland understand—that it is not intervention at this stage which matters, but the fact that the economy is in such deep trouble that we are at the bottom of all the European leagues. That is why Ravenscraig has been picked out at this point.

In this debate, as my hon. Friends and those who represent the rest of industrial Lanarkshire have rightly pointed out, it would be easy to be critical of a Government who have done so little and yet protest so much when the final decision has been taken. One cannot complain if a butterfly cannot get into the air when its wings have been taken off. The Government stood back when the steel industry got into that plight.

British Steel is a public limited company which does not even have the guts to come to Scotland and explain the reasons why a controversial decision was necessary. Sir Bob Scholey may well believe in his heart of hearts that it is the right decision, but if that is so, as the steward of the private steel industry in this country, why did he not have the courage and decency to face those people who rose to every exhortation to deal with the challenge put before them?

I shall briefly outline some of the arguments put by Rev. John Potter to hon. Members. He did not do so in a spirit of looking back or of recrimination. Practical issues concern him and should concern all Members of the House. He mentioned the number of small companies which will be dramatically affected as a result of the

premature closure of Ravenscraig and which cannot expect to get headlines in the way that major companies have. Both he and I ask the Minister whether it is possible to survey the impact on such small companies and study what can be done for them. What about employees of the contractors' firms, who will not be able to share in the benefits of the redundancy terms offered by British Steel? What will be done in the way of retraining and re-employment for the people affected?

Rev. John Potter asks about the possibility of a "brainstorming" meeting at which ideas, many of which were raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray), for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) and for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), could be put forward to help the future regeneration of an area which has been so hard hit. He asks about the enterprise zone. I shall not go over the ground covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) about the unacceptable and unforgivable delay in moving between the recommendation of the Lanarkshire working party and the application for enterprise zone status. What about the delay and uncertainty that will be created in the meantime before the small enterprise zones get off the ground? Those few questions are relevant, reasonable and deserve serious and sober answers from a Government who have an obligation and a responsibility.

The decision to close Ravenscraig has been a blow to the industrial heartlands of Scotland and to the thousands of people and their families whose livelihoods depend upon those works. The workers of Ravenscraig have done so much, not just in terms of campaigning, but in delivering productivity and production records. The communities that will be affected are linked together in their sadness—but although they are sad, they are far from beaten.

9.40 pm

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson), who has brought dignity back to the debate. He reminded us that 400 miles away many people are sad and have been deeply damaged by what has occurred. We must keep that memory constant.

My hon. Friend was also right to remind us that when Scholey promised that steel would continue to be made at Ravenscraig until 1994, Labour Members knew that that was not a reprieve, but a stay of execution. Sir Robert Scholey—never kind and gentle to Scotland—thought that that was how long he would need in Lanarkshire. That was his pessimistic estimate because he wanted out of Lanarkshire. The Government's principal fault lies in their running of the economy, which was such as to surpass even the pessimism of Sir Robert. The economy was run down to the extent that Sir Robert felt that he could move out two years before his pessimistic promise.

The Government must come to terms with their guilt. The decision has been put down to market conditions, but a market does not just occur. A market is constructed mainly by Government policies. The recession that the Government have created is the reason, above all, why we are here on this sad night.

We must look ahead at what we can do. We would not start from here. It is a tragic point from which to start. We would certainly not give any promises that we cannot deliver.

My memory of tonight is of the quiet dignity of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray). Motherwell has been served well by its Members of Parliament. I shall remember the quiet dignity with which my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South has pursued this issue for a decade or more. He is constantly seeking solutions.

A strange absence from the debate has been talk about private sector leadership and the enterprise culture, of which we heard so much in 1988 and 1989. What has happened to them? Why are they not mentioned now? Now we are thrown back, as we always knew that we would be, on the need for public sector intervention.

We must obviously carry on seeking a buyer, and we must give every encouragement to that buyer if one can be found. Another striking thing about my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South—and all good wishes to him—is that he has more ideas than are produced from all the resources of the Government.

The enterprise zone concept must be pursued with all energy, not picked up again whenever bad news appears. The Government are jerked into activity only when there is bad news. There is no zeal about them. We must stop all dishonesty about capital involvement, an issue to which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) referred. There must be nothing tricky about the resources that will be put in. We must be told clearly just what are the new resources.

We must examine the capital infrastructure that is needed, and let it be clear that there is no political game playing between regional councils and the Government over roads. We must demand an environmental clean-up from British Steel. That is the least we should have. British Steel must go beyond the legal minimum, and I hope that the Minister will assure us that he is persuading, even forcing, the company to do that.

We must get the full educational and training resources of the country into Lanarkshire. There must be a full analysis of the job and investment prospects. Let us abandon the pretence that the local enterprise companies can cope with education and training. In their employment training and youth training programmes, they are concerned with 2 to 3 per cent. of the work force and the available-to-work force. The local enterprise companies are involved with only 20 per cent. of 16 and 17-year-olds who are on YT schemes. That is not the way forward with education and training in the context of which we are speaking. Reference has been made to the possibility of upgrading the education institutions of Lanarkshire and making sure that the universities and colleges in the area are fully involved.

We must review the rundown of the East Kilbride development corporation. It is extraordinary that the Government are not prepared to look at that issue. What dogma is behind that? What difficulties are there between Scottish Enterprise, the local development agency and East Kilbride development corporation?

It is sheer folly for the message to be sent out in respect of the East Kilbride development corporation, "We are winding down." It is extraordinary that that should be happening now in Lanarkshire, which has the most successful job development agency in the country. The message now going out reads, "We are winding down and shutting up," even though that body last year, in the dire conditions of the time, attracted 1,100 jobs and £34 million

[Mr. Tony Worthington]

of capital to Lanarkshire. Yet the Government will not even address the question whether the East Kilbride development corporation can be kept going.

The Scottish Office must take full responsibility for that state of affairs, for it has acted with truly Thatcherite zeal. Even the present Government could not have done more. The contrast, on the issue of public expenditure, between the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office is truly remarkable. The Welsh Development Agency budget went up 98 per cent. between 1979 and 1990. The Scottish Development Agency budget, in the same 11-year period, stagnated; it increased by only 2·4 per cent. That happened at the choice of the Government.

When the Welsh had steel closures in the early 1980s, at present-day prices an additional £187 million went to the Welsh areas, and good luck to them for that. When Scottish Enterprise was set up—we knew that it would happen—there was a cut of nearly £200 million in its budget. Its budget in Lanarkshire, until there was a protest, was cut from £7 million to £4·2 million, a reduction of 42 per cent. The original allocation to the Lanarkshire development agency went down from £7·3 million to £4·2 million. There was then a protest and the Government realised—again, in embarrassment—that the figure should be adjusted, and so it was. Unless the Government are constantly brought to face the problems, they will back away from and neglect Lanarkshire.

The Government have failed Lanarkshire. Last Monday, the Secretary of State pretended that the closure of Ravenscraig would add just 1 per cent. to Lanarkshire's unemployment rate. Over a period of 11 years, Motherwell lost 60 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs, and Lanarkshire as a whole lost 40 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs before the closure of Ravenscraig. In the Lanarkshire travel-to-work area in 1979, male unemployment was 10 per cent. It is now 20 per cent. That is a measure of the Government's derelict position on training in Lanarkshire. The Government should go, and they should take their guilt with them.

9.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): This is an important debate. In one sense, it has been two debates. In the first debate, hon. Members on both sides of the House made constructive and reasoned suggestions about the future of Lanarkshire. Those hon. Members included my hon. Friends the Members for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro), for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), who rightly pointed to the dangers of intervention. I do not think that he was arguing about whether it was wrong for a Conservative Government to have been instrumental in setting up Ravenscraig in the first place. Speeches of Opposition Members also contained constructive and reasoned suggestions. The comments of the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) about the Ravenscraig site and the enterprise zone were correct. I shall come to the points raised by the hon. Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) if I have sufficient time. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) referred to the points made by the Rev. John Potter. I was glad to meet the Rev. John Potter this morning. He has made a major contribution and I agree substantially with the points which he made to me and which the hon. Member for Hamilton made to the House.

The second debate has been political. I have seldom seen the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) under such pressure. He is normally the most courteous of Members in giving way, but he would not give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who not only represented a steelworks but was on the Committee that considered the British Steel Bill, to which the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) so effectively referred in his speech. That saves me from repeating exactly the same in mine.

The Labour Members who made the political arguments in this debate were bowled middle stump. Either they are socialists, in which case they must agree with the thoughts and philosophy of the hon. Member for Govan, or they are loyal followers of the Leader of the Opposition. The right hon. Gentleman seems to be having all sorts of meetings tonight because each time Labour Members were challenged about the quotation in this morning's *Financial Times* they said that they had had a meeting with the Leader of the Opposition and had checked the policies. There will be a U-turn tomorrow, so we shall see the right hon. Gentleman's next argument.

Opposition Members cannot tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should have intervened in some undefined way given that the Leader of the Opposition said—I remind them of the quotation—that the steel industry did not need

"some civil servant or minister sitting on their shoulder saying to them well, strategically this is what we think you should do."

That is what the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition said, and the hon. Member for Garscadden has been bowled middle stump, not by Conservative Members but by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Dewar: The hon. Gentleman seems to have the rather odd view that either one is in favour of total intervention and state control in every situation, despite the practicalities, or one does nothing at all. That is the choice that he is presenting. Does it not occur to him that there are some politicians who, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition advocates in that article, look at intervention where it is justified and act in the way that the circumstances demand? That is what we have been advocating throughout and that is what we want to do now. We do not believe in going down the public ownership road when there clearly is a market problem and there clearly is no case for it, but we do not believe in sitting on our backsides and doing nothing, as the bewhiskered Under-Secretary is advocating.

Mr. Stewart: I should like to be a fly on the wall at the forthcoming meeting between the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Garscadden when they try to sort out what the Labour party's policy actually is.

Mr. Tom Clarke *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: I will give way, but it will have to be for the last time.

Mr. Clarke: The Minister will recall that I gave way in a five-minute speech, so he is not over-generous. Does he accept that the fundamental issue of the Secretary of

State's role between 20 December and 9 January was what he did or did not do? Why did he not remind British Steel that we were given not a letter, not a promise, not a meeting, but a guarantee? What happened to the guarantee?

Mr. Stewart: My right hon. Friend of course asked for and was given a meeting with the chairman of British Steel and his colleagues. We went through the guarantee, which was always subject, of course, to market conditions. But I will tell the hon. Member what would have been the case if the Labour Government had been elected last October. The Labour Secretary of State for Scotland would not have been told anything by British Steel, because it would not have trusted a Labour Government to keep the matters confidential.

Mr. Dewar *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman would not give way more than once.

I turn to the constructive points that have been made from both sides of the House. My hon. Friends the Members for Dumfries and for Tayside, North, the hon. Member for Gordon and, of course, the constituency Members and others have rightly paid tribute to the Ravenscraig work force for their hard work, effort and endeavour. I, too, pay tribute to them, and I hope that when the furore has died down British Steel will lose no opportunity to pay the same tribute—*[Interruption.]* It is not a matter for laughter. It is crucial for the future of Lanarkshire that firms are encouraged to come into Lanarkshire and that the message that the work force are skilled and dedicated and that this closure was no fault of theirs gets across to the whole industrial community.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and other hon. Members talked about the future. I entirely accept that we must look at mechanisms that will follow up the success of the Lanarkshire working party. I am discussing that with Lanarkshire development agency. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Hamilton that not just economic consultants and economists have expertise and that we must involve the whole community.

What have we had from the Opposition? We have had from the Scottish National party a policy that is unworkable and, from the Labour party, no policy at all. The Labour party gave not £1-worth of extra commitment to Lanarkshire tonight. I urge the House to support the Government's amendment.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 212, Noes 242.

Division No.l 54] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David

Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding
Mr. Thomas McAvoy

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 195.

Division No. 55] **[10.11 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes

Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gilf, Christopher
Dilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Sir Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raffan, Keith
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rowe, Andrew
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope and Mr. Tim Boswell.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey

Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House commends the Government's response to the announcement by British Steel of its decision to close Ravenscraig; acknowledges the extensive and effective nature of the measures already being undertaken by the Government as part of its continuing commitment to improve the economy and infrastructure in Lanarkshire, in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, the Lanarkshire Development Agency, and a range of other public and private bodies; welcomes the Government's commitment of some £120 million since the beginning of March 1991 for economic development and training in Lanarkshire; and supports the proposal by Her Majesty's Government that an enterprise zone be established in North Lanarkshire.

PETITION

Woolmer Green (Shop)

10.23 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I am privileged to have the opportunity to present a petition on behalf of 710 residents of Woolmer Green in my constituency. The petition concerns the proposed closure of the local village shop because of the approval by the local authority, Welwyn and Hatfield council, of a planning application. The petitioners oppose it on the ground that it would deprive the vicinity of a vital amenity. That will bring undue hardship upon the people of Woolmer Green, especially the village's many senior citizens. The petition concludes:

Whereupon your petitioners pray that your honourable House will support the view of your petitioners, and your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Jeremy Thorpe

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

10.24 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): I start by quoting from my maiden speech nearly 13 years ago:

"I should like to start my career in this House by paying a deep and sincere tribute to my predecessor, Mr. Jeremy Thorpe. As a constituency Member, he was without equal, and there is no doubt of the respect and affection in which he was and is still held in our constituency."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 941.]

Mr. Thorpe is now ill with Parkinson's disease, a fact known and regretted throughout north Devon and further. This debate in public is about Parkinson's disease and a particular experimental treatment. It is also about the health service treatment of Mr. Thorpe, since it was his doctors who approached me, and his wish, not mine, which has put the matter into the public domain.

The Parkinson's Disease Society has been in touch with me, and I am grateful to its chief executive, Mrs. Mary Baker, both for information and for helping me understand the problems. She advises me that the treatment involves the implant of brain cells from an aborted foetus which must be 10 to 11 weeks' gestation.

The Litchdon medical centre is a practice of eight doctors in Barnstaple. All eight doctors signed a letter on 13 December to the Secretary of State for Health and asked me to pass it on. They copied the letter to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) and to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), and also to the North Devon community health council.

I must read the letter, written by Dr. Beer on behalf of the practice, because it is the crux and the purpose of the debate:

"The Right Hon. Jeremy Thorpe recently underwent a new and innovative neurosurgical operation carried out by Professor Hitchcock, Consultant Neurosurgeon at the Midland Centre for Neurosurgery and Neurology, Nottingham, as a National Health Service patient. Mr. Thorpe was originally referred to Professor Hitchcock by his London neurologist. Professor Hitchcock agreed that neurosurgery could be beneficial. He was told that there was a waiting list and that he must be referred by his General Practitioner, as a National Health Service patient, in order that the local Health Authority provide the necessary funding, as the operation is only available on the N.H.S.

Mr. Thorpe then approached me, his General Practitioner here in Barnstaple and asked to be referred to Professor Hitchcock. I contacted the North Devon District Health Authority and asked for an extra-contractual referral to be made for this operation. This request was turned down because of the cost and the fact that the present 30 per cent. success rate of this operation did not represent 'value for money'. Mr. Thorpe then contacted the Health Authority himself and pleaded his case to no avail. Because Mr. Thorpe resides for part of the time in London, he decided to try another Health Authority. He registered with a G.P. near his London home who contacted his District Health Authority who readily agreed to finance his brain operation as an extra contractual referral, and surgery was carried out within a short space of time. Mr. Thorpe is the 47th patient to receive this form of new treatment and he tells us that his medical condition has dramatically improved.

In the new document—The Patients' Charter—there are listed seven existing rights; the first of which states: 'Every citizen has the right to receive health care on the basis of clinical need regardless of the ability to pay'. The fact that one Health Authority felt unable to fund this operation and yet another Health Authority felt able to provide the necessary monies does call into question whether the Patients' Charter does actually work. The Midland Centre for Neurosurgery and Neurology is the only centre in the United Kingdom able to provide such a pioneering operation which is only available through the N.H.S. If Mr. Thorpe had not been in a fortunate position of being able to register with a G.P. in a different Health Authority, he would not have had his operation. This situation has enormous implications for all patients who require an extra contractual referral based on clinical need. We look forward to your reply."

That letter was signed by Dr. Richard Beer and the other seven doctors in the practice.

I forwarded the letter to my right hon. Friend and informed Dr. Beer that that had been done. In addition, I asked the practice about the change of GP, since few of my constituents have the advantage of choice about which authority they use. Being unaware of the details within the North Devon health authority, and seeking in no way to make critical judgments myself, I obtained a copy of the minute of the health authority. It reads:

"The director of medical services . . . drew members' attention to a recent article in the British Medical Journal which highlighted that, out of 18 clients treated, the 22·2 per cent. success rate related only to those clients under the age of 50 years. The members re-emphasised the decision, taken at a previous meeting, not to pay for this treatment."

The committee made a judgment, based on the recommendation of its director. The Secretary of State replied:

"In the case Dr. Beer refers to, the treatment involved is a relatively new and largely unproven one. A recent British Medical Journal article indicated that in a survey of eighteen patients treated in this way only four"—

that is the 22·2 per cent.—

"showed any significant improvement."

My right hon. Friend then said:

"I understand that in this instance Dr. Beer's request was considered at some length by an assessment panel of six which included the District Chair, Chief Executive and District Director of Public Health. The decision was I am told based on clinical grounds because of the unproven nature of the treatment. District Health Authorities have a difficult task in deciding priorities for treatment within available resources. I would not expect these decisions to be uniform across the country because of different local circumstances and the likelihood of different clinical views on the efficacy of particular treatment. The North Devon HA took clinical advice in assessing this individual case and on the basis of that advice decided that this ECR was not a high priority for funding. I would not see this however in any way abrogating General Practitioner's basic rights of referral."

My right hon. Friend ends his letter by saying:

"I am pleased to learn that following the granting of an ECR by Parkside HA Mr. Thorpe has received treatment and that it is proving beneficial."

Shortly afterwards, I received another letter from the practice, dated 20 January. As time is short, I shall just make the four points referred to in the letter. The practice reiterated its concern about having the freedom to refer patients according to clinical need. The practice pointed out that the criteria upon which Mr. Thorpe's referral was turned down are invalid and says:

"The NHS changes must not be allowed to stymie new medical treatments, otherwise",

it asks,

"how can pioneering work and advances take place? An initial success rate of 4 out of 18 patients is a rate of almost 25 per cent. and this, for a new treatment in the most difficult cases, would be very acceptable."

The practice is also concerned that the standard of care may depend on which area a person lives in and what money is available. The fourth point is:

"Why should a Health Authority turn down an unproven treatment when it holds contracts with Homeopathic Hospitals and is prepared to pay for such treatment to be carried out?"

[Mr. Tony Speller]

The letter concludes:

"We feel that this situation would not have arisen if ERCs were not included in health authority budgets. We would recommend that these should be taken out of such budgets."

Apart from the issues that affect Mr. Thorpe personally, questions are raised by this form of treatment that affect any national health service patient who is similarly afflicted. I have four questions for my hon. Friend the Minister. First, is this treatment, when successful, likely to reduce the effects of the disease, or does it have only a palliative effect, in that side effects are avoided from powerful drugs that would otherwise have to be used?

Secondly, is this treatment acceptable under medical ethics? We are talking about the brain tissue of an aborted foetus whose gestation period has to be between 10 and 11 weeks. There is the possibility of pressure being brought to bear to produce an aborted foetus at that stage for the treatment. I do not pretend to know what the ethics committee would say about that. Does my hon. Friend hope that it may be a valuable treatment, to be made available, if finally proven, to sufferers of Parkinson's disease throughout the health service?

Thirdly, if the treatment is available currently, upon clinical decision, under the national health service, should it not be available to patients in north Devon as readily as it is available to patients in London?

Fourthly, extra-contractual referrals are clearly at the discretion of the health authority concerned, but surely clinical decision must be the main criterion. While this treatment remains at the experimental stage, may I suggest that the logical position is that prospective patients who have been referred onward by the general practitioner and consultant should be selected—probably by Professor Hitchcock himself—and financed centrally as part of the experimental budget? It is unreasonable that local health authorities should have to compare routine needs—for hernia operations, or knee and hip joint operations—with the problems surrounding experimental surgery, of which they must have no direct knowledge.

Sufferers from Parkinson's disease are many, and their problems are hateful and hurtful. I now know that they are not automatically exempt from prescription charges, and I draw my hon. Friend the Minister's attention to the recommendation of the Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom, which I support, that sufferers should be exempt from prescription charges.

My constituents remember the dashing figure of Jeremy Thorpe. I take no pleasure in bringing this case before the House, although his example may well prove a catalyst to bring help to fellow sufferers.

The patients charter is a bold commitment from a strong Prime Minister who believes, as I do, in a one-class, first-class health service. I receive no complaints of substance about the excellent health service in north Devon; nor do I believe that it has exceeded its authority in any way. But the nagging thought remains—why "Yes" in London, but "No" in Devon if the patient and the clinical advice were the same?

10.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) began by drawing attention to the fact that he has always been generous in his praise of the constituency record of Jeremy Thorpe. Although neither my hon. Friend nor I were Members of the House when Mr. Thorpe was a Member, we both remember that, as my hon. Friend said, he was a "dashing figure" in the politics of the 1970s. As my hon. Friend rightly said, Parkinson's disease is a distressing condition, and it will be a cause of sadness to all hon. Members that Mr. Thorpe has come to suffer from it. I do not believe that the House would expect me to comment on Mr. Thorpe's particular case, beyond expressing the sympathy of the House for his condition. The health service takes seriously the issues of confidentiality which surround the treatment of its patients, and it would be wrong for me to discuss in the House the details of Mr. Thorpe's individual treatment.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, however, the handling of Mr. Thorpe's case raises some important general principles about the management of the health service. I am grateful for this opportunity to clarify any uncertainty that may have resulted from this case, the specific circumstances which lay behind it and the way in which it had to be decided. I refer especially to the fact that Mr. Thorpe had access to two general practitioners and thus to two separate decision-making processes, which arrived at different conclusions.

I begin by repeating the point that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made in a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North on 14 January, that in an organisation the size of the health service, which deals with so many patient contacts, it should not be surprising—indeed, it should be welcomed—that we do not seek to impose total uniformity on every single decision that is made about the treatment of patients across the country. To attempt to do so, even if it were possible——

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland) *rose*——

Mr. Dorrell: If I may, I should like to develop my argument because there are several aspects to it.

I firmly believe that it would be impossible to deliver that objective, even had we wanted it. But even if it were possible, it would be actively undesirable to seek to impose precise uniformity in relation to every decision taken about the treatment of health service patients, because that would mean that no individual within the health service could try a different approach without first having had it cleared through a myriad of different committees. We seek to establish in the health service a system of decision-making which allows different people to reach different conclusions subject to some basic principles which clearly must underlie the delivery of socialised medicine. Provided that they are consistent with the basic principles set out, as my hon. Friend rightly said, in among other places, the patients charter, the fact that different decisions may be reached in different parts of the country is not surprising. Indeed, one of the benefits or desirable aspects of the health service is that different clinicians and managers can try out different alternative approaches.

The fact that we recognise that different people in the health service will produce different answers to the same questions is manifest in the fact that different health authorities will reach different conclusions, based on their assessment of the health needs of their resident populations and of their local priorities.. They will also

reach conclusions about the allocation of resources and their priority in terms of the use of resources to address the specific health needs of their local populations.

Health authorities will reach those conclusions under the reformed health service in close consultation with their general practitioners. The intention is that the decisions that health authorities take about the placing of contracts should reflect the views of GPs and also the health authority's assessment of the district's local health priorities. However, once the health authority has placed those contracts in those terms, we come to the questions which determine the decisions about the honouring of extra-contractual referrals. That is the issue which lies at the heart of Mr. Thorpe's case.

The Secretary of State has asked me specifically to clarify the principles which underlie the administration of ECRs within the reformed health service. When speaking to the council of the Royal College of General Practitioners on 9 May last year he said:

"We have consistently repeated the principle that the reforms should not cut across GPs' freedom of referral. That remains the case. If, for clinical reasons, a GP wishes to refer a patient to a hospital that is not contracted to provide a service to the GP's district, the GP must be able to do so."

That is a direct quotation from a speech made by my right hon. Friend. The Government regard themselves as bound by that principle, and we expect to see it carried out by the management of the health service. As that is the political sphere given to the health service—it is a public service accountable through my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the House—the management of the health service has set out clearly how that principle should be applied to the management of ECRs.

Paragraph 3.14 of the management document, "Contracts for Health Service Operational Principles", states:

"The DHA will not challenge the GP's choice of provider unless it can be shown that the proposed referral is wholly unjustified on clinical grounds, or where an alternative referral would be equally efficacious for the patient, taking into account the patient's wishes."

So the test that has to be applied before a health authority refuses an ECR is that the decision must be "wholly unjustifiable on clinical grounds". The fact that that is the test does not detract from the fact that the health authority remains responsible for the management of the ECR budget. I disagree with my hon. Friend's constituents on this point. Once the authority has accepted that an individual ECR is not wholly unjustifiable on clinical grounds, it remains a management responsibility of the health authority to balance the clinical priority of acceptance of a particular ECR against its budgetary considerations. The budgetary responsibility rests with the health authority.

The decision about an individual referral on clinical grounds, however—provided that it is not wholly unjustifiable—rests ultimately with the GP. I emphasise to the House that that has been made clear both in the speech of my right hon. Friend to the council of the Royal College of General Practitioners and in the management advice document issued by the management executive. So the principles cannot be regarded as being in any doubt.

My hon. Friend would then understandably say, "How does it come about, then, that North Devon health authority finds itself in the position that it does on this referral?" The best answer that I can give him is that the fact that Mr. Thorpe had available to him the escape route of appealing to a health authority elsewhere in the country meant that the process was not carried to its conclusion in north Devon. Mr. Thorpe had available to him a quicker way to secure the referral that he was seeking to the unit in Birmingham, so the process was not finally concluded in north Devon. That is best illustrated by the fact that a similar case has been referred by another GP in north Devon to the same unit in Birmingham. Although the decision has not yet been made, that ECR is likely to be approved.

Although in theory we do not know how it would have turned out if that had been the only option available to Mr. Thorpe, we know that the principles are clearly set out in the health service management documents and at a political level by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

No one argues that the referral is wholly unjustifiable on clinical grounds. Clearly the health authority does not argue that because it is about to honour a similar referral to the same unit in Birmingham. We do not know whether the process would have reached its conclusion if Mr. Thorpe had not had the alternative course open to him.

My hon. Friend asked a number of questions about the treatment. He asked about its effectiveness, whether it would have a palliative effect, and how it would work. I am advised that if an implant is successful it would reduce the need for medication and would therefore reduce the likelihood of the side effects that may be caused by drug treatment. That is my advice, although I emphasise to my hon. Friend that I am not a clinician and he does not need to be told that.

My hon. Friend asked me about the medical ethics of the issue. The position is clear. All research or therapy of an innovative nature in the health service, especially that involving foetuses or foetal material, requires the approval of a local research ethics committee. Such committees are established at district health authority level and include medical and nursing staff, GPs and lay members. They provide independent advice to local management on the ethical acceptability of any research proposed.

My hon. Friend asked why, if the treatment is available on clinical decision in London, it is not available in north Devon and I have dealt with that. He also asked what criteria should be applied in deciding priorities. Perhaps the best answer to that question is that we have recently established an NHS research and development directorate, under Professor Michael Peckham. Its programme will place emphasis on evaluations of the quality, effectiveness and cost of methods of disease prevention and treatment, and on research into the delivery and cost of health care. The answer to my hon. Friend's question rests with the new research and development directorate of the NHS management executive.

Mr. Wallace: In the letter from the Secretary of State which the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) read out, as well as saying that differences are likely to arise because of different clinical views, he said that they may arise because of different local circumstances. Can the Minister say whether those might include resources? Secondly, while I heard what he said about the fact that, in the case of Mr. Thorpe, the process in north Devon was not exhausted, the theoretical position remains that the treatment may not have been available in north Devon, but was made available in London by virtue of the fact that Mr. Thorpe had two residences and was registered in

[Mr. Wallace]

two places. Does he accept that it is unsatisfactory that that could have happened? Patients who are very ill may find that they are under pressure to find another place to register. Given their state of health, that is not desirable.

Mr. Dorrell: Those two questions have the same answer. I stress that the principle which underlies the acceptance of a particular ECR is that any health authority will, ultimately, accept an ECR that is not wholly unjustifiable on clinical grounds. A health authority retains, of course, the responsibility for ordering its own budgetary priorities.

It has never been the principle of any health service management that the acceptance of a referral means that the person referred will be seen tomorrow. To balance demand against available resources is a continuing function of health service management intra-contractually and extra-contractually. If a referral is not wholly unjustifiable on clinical grounds, it is not open to a health authority, wherever it is, ultimately to refuse to honour an ECR.

We would actively encourage health authorities to ensure that their resources were used effectively. If an ECR is made that is surprising to the clinicians working in a health authority, questions should be asked to ensure that it represents a fair use of resources. The GP who made that referral should understand the options available and the implications of his referral. If the GP insists on that referral, the health authority will honour it, provided that it is not wholly unjustifiable on clinical grounds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North asked about prescription charges and whether sufferers from Parkinson's disease should be exempt from them. He will be aware that that has been the subject of a long-standing argument in the health service. We have sought to concentrate assistance with prescription charges on those whose incomes are such that the charges cause a problem. We have not sought to extend the list of conditions which entitle a sufferer to exemption from prescription charges. We offer help through our income-related system and through the season ticket system, which limits the cost of a prescription to an individual patient.

I emphasise that I do not believe that any individual or manager in the health service has done anything in this case which departs from the principles upon which the health service is built. The district health authority received an unusual ECR and in those circumstances it was entitled to ensure that the use of resources involved in that decision was justified. It was also entitled to ensure that the GP who made the referral understood the implications of his decision.

The process in this case did not reach its logical conclusion because Mr. Thorpe—I commend him on his ingenuity, a quality with which the nation knows he is amply endowed—found a way to secure the necessary care. Nothing that I have read about the case leads me to the conclusion that anything untoward happened or that the basic and important principle of the GP's right to refer has been undermined.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 January 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Royal Parks

9.34 am

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I have here a petition with about 22,000 signatures, principally of visitors and the staff of the royal parks who are concerned about the proposed privatisation of those parks because they fear a consequent fall from the high standards established in them.

The petition reads:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the staff of, and visitors to, the Royal Parks Sheweth

That the government, through Mr. Michael Heseltine MP, has signified its intentions to contract out the work carried out in London's Royal Parks.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House halt the contracting out of the maintenance of the Royal Parks.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Traffic Calming Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.35 am

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of the Bill is to introduce the concept of traffic calming into statute. Traffic calming is a way of containing vehicle speeds by self-enforcing engineering measures and improving driver behaviour. It is further intended to change people's attitudes so that they drive more smoothly and are aware of the kind of roads that they are using and drive at speeds tailored to fit the environment.

Traffic calming is specifically directed at urban areas, particularly residential roads in our towns and villages. The Bill has twin objectives—the reduction of road casualties in built-up areas, particularly among the young and the elderly, and the improvement of the road environment near where people live.

The Bill applies equally to England, Wales and Scotland. I wish to take this early opportunity to thank the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I know that his party would have preferred a separate Bill for Scotland, introduced by the Scottish Office, but it understands that because of a shortage of time the only way to achieve its objective is for one Bill to cover England, Wales and Scotland. I also wish to thank the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) who suggested in the first place that the Bill should apply to Scotland as well as to England and Wales. I have a general word of thanks to members of the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties who have given me their support and, through them, to the various councils in their areas which have also expressed support for the Bill. They consider that it should be enacted.

The need for the Bill, which will tidy up the law on the legality of traffic-calming measures, is easy to see throughout the country. Although the most commonly used traffic-calming measures, road humps, are governed by statute and are subject to clear regulations, other techniques such as chicanes, road narowing, different road surfaces, shared road surfaces, rumble strips and gateways are not properly covered by legislation. Some doubt has been cast on the legality of all or some of those methods in certain circumstances.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): On behalf of pedestrians in general, may I say how much the Bill will be greatly welcomed in all parts of the country? Although a lot of attention is given to motor journeys and to journeys by bus, we are all interested in the safety of people on foot because even motorists walk around. Certainly, those who are on foot rely on road users, be they on motor cycles or in cars, to drive safely.

Will my hon. Friend acknowledge that the road hump regulations had to be changed two or three times? That had to be done, first, to reduce costs to a level that highway authorities could afford and, secondly, to deal with circumstances that were perhaps too tightly restricted. My hon. Friend's Bill will enable local highway authorities to

[Mr. Peter Bottomley]

take account of the interests of all their residents as well as those travelling through their areas. That will be of great service to pedestrians.

I have listened to my hon. Friend's speech with great interest. I fear that I may not be able to take part in the debate as I intend to cause trouble for the Government over Oxleas wood, which is in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), but I hope that my hon. Friend will regard my support as being with him throughout the debate.

Mr. Mans: I fully agree with my hon. Friend's remarks about pedestrians. One of the central parts of my Bill is intended to cut down the number of pedestrian casualties, and I shall explain that more fully later. The purpose of the Bill is not to over-regulate but to allow as much discretion to local authorities as possible, bearing in mind that we also need certainty within the law, and I hope that I have struck a balance.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Before my hon. Friend further develops his theme, will he explain whether it is envisaged that measures that might result from the Bill will include action to control traffic on narrow roads? I am sure that my hon. Friend and many right hon. and hon. Members will understand that, although this issue is important in cities and built-up areas, in rural areas such as Shropshire we face immense problems because of large—often continental—lorries charging around the country lanes. They are considerably wider than normal traffic and are often very dangerous. There have been a number of fatalities in my constituency. Although the issue may not be of great interest in urban areas, it is important in rural areas, and I wonder whether the Bill will tackle the problem of road widths and the width of vehicles travelling down narrow country lanes.

Mr. Mans: I sincerely hope that it will. I have been interested in the number of representations that I have received from country areas and I see no reason why the Bill cannot apply to villages, too. It is basically an enabling measure to allow more discretion to local authorities to take measures, within a light regulatory framework, so that roads are more suited to the traffic using them, bearing in mind other road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists, and local people in villages and constituencies like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Conway). I hope that the Bill will enable the measures that he wants to be put in operation.

Before the interventions I was discussing the legality of existing measures and whether that had held up the introduction of traffic-calming measures. There has been some doubt about the law with regard to traffic-calming measures other than road humps which has meant that authorities have produced traffic-calming schemes but have been left in some doubt as to whether they could be prosecuted for obstructing the highway. Other authorities have held back before embarking on such highly desirable projects because of that uncertainty in the law.

One of the primary reasons for the Bill is to clarify the law. Also, once the law is straightened out, it should result in clearer advice from the Department of Transport on traffic-calming measures.

I have received considerable assistance in drafting the Bill from the Government and from my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic, who is on the Front Bench. I am indebted to his Department for all the technical help that I have received from it, and I sincerely hope that the Bill is a better measure as a result.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I hope that my hon. Friend understands that, although it is unusual to contribute at this point in the debate, there are reasons for it.

Does my hon. Friend agree that we should also pay tribute to Friends of the Earth which, when I was a Minister at the Department of Transport, suggested that it would be sensible for the Minister with responsibility for roads to go to the Netherlands with some civil servants to see how traffic calming works there. We learnt not merely that the "woorerf" idea—which is unpronounceable and unspellable—can work, but that it is too expensive to be applied everywhere, even in the Netherlands. We also learnt that one can integrate the interests of motorists by using bypasses to take through traffic away, and go in for traffic-calming measures which work. Does he agree that we should pay tribute to those civil servants who cycled around, before and after the Minister, to ensure his safe journey?

Mr. Mans: I am more than happy to pay tribute to those gallant and courageous civil servants who led or followed my hon. Friend on that exciting detour on the continent. I shall return to the subject of Friends of the Earth later and shall not go into too much detail now.

The Bill is short, containing only five clauses and two schedules, which is a good thing. Essentially it adds to measures in various statutes, notably in the Highways Act 1980—covering England and Wales—and the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, so that traffic-calming techniques of the sort that I outlined can be constructed by highway and road authorities.

That power is given in clauses 1 and 2 and the regulatory framework is outlined in the accompanying schedules. The Secretary of State is given the authority to sanction road and highway authorities' schemes, which may not always fall within the regulations.

I understand that the Bill will also allow temporary traffic-calming measures to be used—for example, with roadworks or other work that does not require the adoption of permanent traffic-calming techniques. Lancashire county council—my highway authority—is especially interested in that and I hope that it will be reassured by that part of the Bill.

I stress that I understand that the regulations will be general and that highway authorities will be given discretion to interpret them in the most appropriate way. Clearly, we need to balance the requirement for certainty and also allow initiatives to be taken by highway and road authorities when dealing with problems in their areas. I sincerely hope that I have managed to strike a balance in the Bill between those two needs.

I assure groups that have contacted me and which are concerned about over-regulation that I want a minimum of regulation and the maximum amount of discretion to be given to local authorities. I believe that the Bill gives that discretion.

I understand that the Government propose to introduce shortly a money resolution in association with the Bill.

I mentioned the primary objective of reducing the number of road casualties. We have a good accident

record in this country and that is due in no small way to the special interest given to the subject by my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) when he was Minister for Roads and Traffic and to the actions of the present Minister. Clearly, reducing the number of road casualties is and has been a priority for the Government for some time. Our accident record is good when judged against that of virtually every other country, and certainly against that of easily comparable European countries.

I am sad to say that we have a different record on pedestrian deaths. It is considerably worse than that in other continental countries. For example, in 1990 there were 1,694 pedestrian deaths on our roads and 367 children died. The majority of other pedestrian casualties were people over 60. There were 3·1 pedestrian deaths per 100,000 of the population, above the average among European Community countries. The figure for child deaths was 2·4 per 100,000 of the population, one of the worst statistics in the European Community, at 31 per cent. above the European Community average.

For example, in West Germany, which has invested heavily in traffic-calming measures in the past 10 years, there has been a large drop in pedestrian fatalities, from 6·2 to 2·3 per 100,000 of the population—a reduction of 63 per cent. In contrast, the drop in the United Kingdom over the same period has been from 4·4 to 3·1 per 100,000 of the population—a reduction of 32 per cent. That illustrates graphically the fact that in 1980 we had fewer pedestrian deaths than West Germany and now we have more. The only quantifiable difference between what happened in this country and in Germany during that period is that the Germans produced many more traffic-calming schemes, which I acknowledge are complicated and in many cases quite expensive. They have clearly had a considerable effect on the pedestrian accident record. Although we have reduced the number of pedestrian deaths in this country—we should not underestimate the work that has been done to achieve that—the results have been less dramatic than in Germany.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing the Bill. While he is speaking about child deaths, will he confirm that if vehicles travelled at 20 mph, only one child in 20 would be killed? Will he comment on the idea of reducing speed limits to that level?

Mr. Mans: Yes, I affirm that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Speed is critical in terms of child deaths and one of the Bill's main purposes is to allow greater flexibility in the use of speed limits. There is no point in simply applying lower speed limits on residential roads if the drivers have not been prepared for the fact that they must slow down. Traffic-calming techniques are meant to encourage a driving style that is more concerned with the surroundings and, as a result, lower speed limits can be introduced. I would go so far as to say that one of the main reasons why there are fewer casualties among pedestrians and particularly children in countries such as West Germany is that that country has more flexibility in the use of speed limits. That must be a primary objective of the Bill.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing this important Bill. I hope that, in what is inevitably a short Session of Parliament, it will be able to complete its passage.

What my hon. Friend says is no doubt the kernel of why we need the Bill. Does he agree that, whereas one can read too much into cause and effect, too many children and other pedestrians are being injured on our roads? Since the Government first introduced road humps in 1981, traffic engineers in too many councils have shown naked hostility to the idea of traffic calming and have completely set their face against the idea of road humps. I do not suggest cause and effect, but authorities must consider carefully the effects of not implementing those measures.

Mr. Mans: It varies across the country. Some local authorities may not have introduced those measures as quickly as possible, but it goes further than that. Many may have been persuaded or encouraged not to do so by the uncertainty in the law, so I would not go quite as far as my hon. Friend in suggesting that local authorities alone are to blame.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: That was a most disgraceful comment by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes). He may have had an unfortunate experience with a highway engineer——

Mr. Hughes: Several.

Mr. Bottomley: I suspect that part of the problem is that councils have an allocation of resources and the Department of Transport has helped by providing extra resources. I wish to say on behalf of highway engineers, both in the counties and the boroughs of the metropolitan districts, that their contribution through their professional associations—the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Institution of Highways and Transportation—and in co-operation with the experts in the Transport and Road Research Laboratory and the Department of Transport has led to much enthusiasm among many of those responsible.

One of the messages from the Bill may be that bringing in those schemes and making them work is one way in which the engineers can show that they have as much to contribute in cutting the number of casualties as those who deal with the behavioural side of driving and those who build the bypasses that take traffic away from towns and villages. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West will not mind my robust defence of those who are not in the House to defend themselves.

Mr. Mans: Perhaps I can find a way through the middle of my two hon. Friends' useful contributions. This is a debate and I welcome differing views on the initiatives shown by road traffic engineers. If the Bill is enacted, as I hope that it will be, I hope that extra impetus will be given to road traffic engineers to come up with innovative schemes. I do not want over-regulation or road traffic engineers simply toeing the line and following regulations as they are laid down where they may not be appropriate for their particular locality. I hope that the Bill will change that so that there are fewer of the type of engineers described by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and more progressive traffic engineers.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves that topic and because there is clear disagreement between his hon. Friends, will he acknowledge that the criteria by which the Department awards funds to the local authorities are framed in such a way that the widest traffic-calming measure that he wishes to

[Ms. Joan Ruddock]

introduce, not just for safety reasons, is not possible? The problem is not necessarily caused by the unwillingness of local authorities. Lewisham council, for instance, is very willing, but often it is unable to secure sufficient resources from the Department to implement all the traffic-calming measures that it would wish. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that there is a resource problem.

Mr. Mans: Obviously, there will always be resource problems for a variety of activities that local authorities would like to carry out, under whatever Government exist at a particular time. Local authorities such as Lewisham will probably be able to make out a much better case for money to be allocated within the overall grant specifically for traffic-calming measures, because the Bill makes it clear that that money can be allocated not only on road safety grounds but through environmental improvement grants. It is important to find a measure that has much support from both sides of the House, bearing in mind the time constraints of this Session, so that we get something on the statute book to improve matters. I fully acknowledge that it may not be ideal to everyone, but it will at least be an improvement on what has gone before.

Before all those helpful interventions, I was discussing pedestrian casualties. Differing casualty rates in other countries are one thing; we also have distinct differences within Great Britain, where there are great regional variations. My region, the north-west, comes out badly, with road deaths among pedestrians 37 per cent. above the national average. Therefore, the Bill is particularly relevant to the part of the world that I represent. That may be because of the number of large conurbations in the north-west, but other factors may also be involved. There are wide regional variations and I hope that my Bill will address problems where they are clearly greatest, such as in the north-west of England.

As well as referring to various techniques to help road safety, the Bill is intended to enhance the environment. The adverse effects of traffic on the appearance of our streets take many forms: the visual intrusion of vehicles on the street scene, particularly from heavy goods vehicles; the ugliness of road surfaces; the railings that protect pedestrians; high-intensity lighting; and the degradation of buildings and paving materials as a result of the continous heavy flow of traffic.

Traffic-calming measures improve the appearance of streets by narrowing carriageways and widening footpaths so that the scale of the street is restored to human proportions. Dark surfaces can be replaced by attractive materials which are more sympathetic to the surrounding buildings. Functional features such as footway extensions or chicanes can be made more attractive. As space is reclaimed, opportunities arise to plant greenery, thus softening the scene. High-quality street furnishing can also be introduced.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): Does my hon. Friend agree that yellow lines, particularly double ones, are the most appalling intrusion on many of our streets, and there must be better ways to show motorists where they may or may not park?

Mr. Mans: My hon. Friend makes a good point. If there were a number of measures to encourage improvements in the visual appearance of streets, clearly those responsible for such matters could take greater account of factors such as yellow lines, which were perhaps not considered intrusive a few years ago. I believe that the measure will encourage people to look with different eyes on what we are trying to achieve in the streets of our towns and villages.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We could have red lines.

Mr. Mans: I am not sure whether red lines would be much of an improvement on yellow——

Mr. Skinner: Yellow is a bit liberal.

Mr. Mans: In terms of the Bill there is clearly a need, within large towns such as London, to ensure that traffic that needs to flow is allowed to do so. In that respect, I approve of red routes and I should not like anyone to gain a false impression of my views on that.

The features that I have mentioned would emphasise that a street has a variety of functions and is not simply a through road. Many towns in continental Europe have demonstrated that to great effect and there are also examples in the United Kingdom—notably, Exeter. I should like to mention the work of Devon county council and the excellent book that it published on traffic calming, which was of great assistance to me. In my district, Lancashire county council is currently involved in extensive road calming and street improvement work in Preston. I hope that as a result of the legislation any doubtful aspects of the plans will be brought within statute. However, we still have some way to go before we achieve the results that have already been achieved on the continent. We must look across the channel at what has happened over many years in Holland and Germany, where it is easy to see how successful the measures have been.

Apart from the visual appearance of streets, the noise level can be reduced by traffic-calming measures. I know that that will be of interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) who has expressed in previous debates concern about noise levels in urban districts. In most circumstances, exhaust emissions will also be reduced.

Softening the distinction between pavement and carriageway heightens the perception that a street is a shared space and that carriageway users are not restricted to car drivers. I hope that that will benefit cyclists and pedestrians.

In the past few weeks, various organisations and individuals have raised one or two points about the Bill. I can reassure the emergency services which have rightly expressed concern about some traffic-calming measures —mainly because the legal channels available for local authorities have been limited, so emergency services have faced the problem of road humps which form a barrier to those wanting to get to the scene of accidents quickly. Because of the wider range of measures available within the Bill, it should make it easier, rather than harder, for emergency services to reach accident scenes. I hope that, as a result of the certainty that the Bill will bring to the law, the discussions between highway authorities and the emergency services will be more likely to reach satisfactory conclusions than at present.

For example, rather than limiting possible action to the introduction of road humps, the Bill will ensure the use of speed tables, with gaps either side to slow down cars, while allowing larger vehicles such as fire engines and ambulances to reach their destinations quickly. There are many other ways in which road traffic engineers will be able to accommodate the needs of reducing the speed of the normal flow of traffic while allowing good access for emergency vehicles. The planning will take place in a freer atmosphere when matters are discussed by different organisations, and many more solutions will be available to deal with specific problems.

I have received a huge amount of support, not only from hon. Members from all parties—some of whom I am delighted to see here to speak in today's debate—but from a number of outside organisations. I should particularly like to thank Friends of the Earth, whose past work formed the basis of my idea for the Bill. I appreciated that organisation's help during the past few weeks as I attempted to construct the Bill. Many local councils—including my own, Wyre borough council—have written to me directly, and some did so through their Members of Parliament. I have also received letters from other countries—not just from private individuals—and from councils in Scotland, England and Wales. Without exception, they all said that the measure would help their districts. Among other organisations that have shown support for the Bill are the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club, the British Medical Association, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety and cyclist groups.

I hope that I have shown that that shows that the measure has a wide range of support from all political parties and a number of pressure groups with different aims. While the Bill is a small measure in itself, I sincerely believe that it will start a process that will lead to considerable changes in the visual appearance of the streets of our villages and towns in the next few years. I hope that it will result in fewer pedestrian casualties, particularly among the elderly and the young. I commend it to the House.

9.58 am

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on his excellent Bill and I am grateful to him for asking me to be one of its sponsors. The measure has wide support in the House and throughout the country. I was grateful that my hon. Friend found time in his interesting speech to pay tribute to the present Minister for Roads and Traffic and his predecessor. I had the privilege to work with both of them, so I know that their commitment to road safety was profound. The exemplary record of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) in these matters is well known.

I hope that it will please my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, and encourage him, to hear that my constituents in Basildon warmly welcome the Bill. The House will know that Basildon is the finest new town in the country, the finest town in the south, and will shortly be seen to be the most dynamic town in Europe. Basildon was built when Her Majesty the Queen came to the throne and has been developed in an interesting way since then, but the width of its roads leaves something to be desired. Forty years ago, the planners did not foresee the huge increase in car ownership. Some of our roads are just not wide enough for two vehicles to pass. This in itself has caused tremendous problems for my constituents.

I understand that the Bill will lead to the use of a wider range of techniques and to high-quality traffic-calming schemes. I also believe that it will make a significant contribution both to road safety and to local environments.

I am sure that all hon. Members find it distressing to attend a public meeting after an accident in which a child or elderly person has been killed. Petitions are sent in, and eventually the Member of Parliament is called to attend a public meeting, following which there is widespread consultation on traffic-calming measures that the residents believe are necessary. I hope that the true benefit of my hon. Friend's measure will be that, in future, we will second-guess these problems and no longer act after accidents have happened. We must design our roads and traffic flows to make our towns much safer.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who is a diligent attender on a Friday, will join us at some stage today. As he knows only too well, I was born in Newham, and I still take a real interest in it. The borough of Newham has implemented all sorts of traffic-calming measures, particularly humps in roads. Unfortunately, in Capel road in Forest Gate, the residents decided a few years ago that there were too many traffic problems outside the local pub and that they needed to slow down the traffic. Because of the lack of consultation—I am not trying to bash Newham; I will come to Basildon in a moment—the humps were laid in that road at intervals of just a few yards. The planners, in short, went over the top. The tragedy is that the road was used for funeral cars to take mourners to the City of London cemetery, the biggest crematorium/cemetery in London. We can imagine the distress caused to the mourners while they were going over all these bumps. In the end, people had to be taken another way. That is just one example from the early days of traffic calming. If there had been more widespread consultation, that method would never have been used in the first place.

I wish to praise the excellent chairman of the highways committee of our county council, Councillor Ron Williams, who has done a wonderful job working closely with the constabulary in introducing traffic-calming measures in the constituency that I am proud to represent. A conspicious failure, however, is to be found at a turning near where I live, known as Dry street. For two decades, there has been concern about Dry street being used as a rat run. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may smile, but there are still 28 farms and smallholdings left in my constituency. There are still one or two cottages with thatched roofs in Dry street—it is the rural part of my constituency. The road is extremely narrow and along it are horse centres and a large kennels. All the properties are built right on the edge of the road. It has been impossible to obtain an agreement on what to do to stop the turn being used as a rat run.

At one time, one section of the community suggested that we should close the road. The councillor who represented the area was standing for re-election and I suspect that she lost her seat because she decided to support the closure of the road. I took part in a public meeting a year ago, at which we suggested better signs and large mirrors, but still no solution has been found to control the traffic in Dry street. I hope that, by publicly

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airing the matter today, I can send a message to residents and Essex county council that we need a solution to the problems of the street. Some months ago, a car slammed into a horse there—the damage can be imagined.

Some months ago, I was invited to St. Margaret's school in Bowers Gifford, which is in Basildon. It was a well-attended public meeting organised by a parent, held because of the widespread anxiety about the fact that, when children came out of the school, motorists paid no attention to the possible dangers. There was no crossing and no lollipop person—*[Interruption.]* This should not be a cause for mirth: lollipop women and lollipop men do a magnificent job for road safety. They stand there in their oilskins whatever the weather and they are friends of the community, just like local policemen. I am not sure how much the service costs, but I would welcome an increase in their numbers.

I found at the public meeting that it was a classic case of the interested parties not having been listened to at a much earlier stage. The cogs of the bureaucracy had moved slowly in the attempt to implement measures that would help the parents of the children in the school. I realise that my hon. Friend's Bill will be of enormous significance in such cases.

I have received an excellent letter from the Royal Automobile Club. I do not mean to knock the Automobile Association, of which I am a member, but—I have not had a chance to open my post this morning—I am somewhat disappointed not to have received any communication about the Bill from the AA. I therefore cannot present a balanced account of the views of the two organisations.

Nevertheless, the RAC tells us that the chances of survival of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists are greatly enhanced when the vehicles that hit them are driving at less than 20 mph. That was recognised in the excellent recent Department of Transport campaign with the slogan "Kill your speed, not your child".

The shock for the bereaved when anyone is killed in an accident is truly awful. When a child is killed, it is distressing for everyone. We meet constituents who never get over the shock of such a tragedy. On television, there has recently been publicity about those who are left to mourn children. There is also widespread analysis of the people who were responsible for the deaths of children and of the counselling that is avaialble. The RAC is convinced that traffic calming is a self-enforcing means of keeping speed down in areas where pedestrians, and especially children and old people, are likely to be present.

We understand the pressures on motorists to get quickly from A to B, and the fact that the Government are used to being blamed for everything, because it is good knocking copy. Traffic works intended to improve roads slow the traffic flow, and motorists become angry. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) has often spoken about rat runs which develop from road improvements. I agree that the red route has been a great success.

The Bill offers three advantages to motorists. Traffic calming is clearly preferable to road closure as a means of allowing safe interaction between motorised and non-motorised traffic, while maintaining vehicle access. Secondly, it has the advantage of reducing the chance of a motorist being involved in an accident. Thirdly, the deterrence to through traffic reduces the risk of damage to parked vehicles.

The Bill seeks to introduce the concept of traffic calming to highway law because legislation has lagged behind the interest in this developing field. The Bill makes the clear statement that traffic calming embraces the dual goals of road safety and environmental preservation or improvement. The latter has often been overlooked, to the detriment of amenity and the longer-term acceptance of traffic calming schemes.

I have been in the House for many private Members' Bills. This is the first time since I have been in the House that Parliament has gone into its final year. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre on his Bill and on his acceptance of the time difficulty. If one hon. Member objects to such a Bill, the opportunity is lost, but I shall be staggered if any hon. Member seeks to delay the passage of this one. My hon. Friend has the privilege of knowing that if his Bill becomes law, it will save lives, although we cannot say how many. I hope that it will have a speedy passage through both Houses.

10.23 am

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on his Bill. I was pleased to hear the forecast that nobody will object to it. No hon. Member could object to it, except to say that such a measure should have been thought of before. It is a short and lucid Bill, and it stands out a mile to anyone who reads it that its proposals should have been put in train by the Government urgently and energetically.

The Bill is an important little step on the road to a more ordered regime on our streets. In that context, country roads and roads in urban areas are of equal importance. We must try to improve the atmosphere on our roads. Child deaths on the roads could be slashed if the Bill becomes law. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre said, nearly 50,000 children under the age of 15 were killed or injured last year, of whom 417 died and 8,870 were seriously hurt. More than half the fatalities were pedestrians, and boys aged seven and girls aged 12 were the main victims.

The Department of the Environment estimates that 83 per cent. of child casualties occur on built-up roads and that a quarter of pedestrian injuries occur on the way to and from school. It is important for the House to continue to repeat the television campaign message that, at 40 mph, a vehicle will almost certainly kill, at 30 mph half those involved in an accident will die, and at 20 mph only one child in 20 in an accident will be killed. If the debate can get that message over, it will be well worth while.

I was a little upset by the comment of Mr. Ken Jury, the vice-chairman of the Association of District Councils transport committee. Speaking about traffic-calming measures, Mr. Jury recently said:

> "The typical driver will hate them, but, like seat belts and the 70 mph limit, they'll get used to them."

Mr. Jury is totally wrong. The average driver is a parent or is associated with children and will accept the sensible calming measures in the Bill. He will look upon them not as a curse but as measures that are part of civilised society. We must try to eradicate the unfortunate attitude of influential people who oppose sensible improvements to country and urban life such as traffic-calming measures.

Market Harborough has the privilege to be one of the six towns selected for the three-year trial. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre for associating a bypass on the A6 at Market Harborough, which is nearing completion, with one of the new traffic-calming schemes.

Market Harborough is associated with Berkhamstead, Dalton-in-Furness, Petersfield, Wadebridge and Whitchurch, all of which are experiencing traffic-calming measures. Like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, my constituency has experienced agonising road fatalities recently. We have had distressing headlines of children killed in urban areas. We are all anxious, on both sides of the House, that the traffic-calming measures envisaged and put into effect in my constituency in this three-year scheme will be approved and brought into use.

No sensible driver could object to any of these measures. Some people say that the old-fashioned sleeping policeman is a hazard, but I think that he is a useful sort of fellow to have around. We have one in Vincent square, which stopped all the post office vans rushing through at 90 mph at 3 o'clock in the morning. I only wish that the bumps were even more pronounced.

There are other ways to calm traffic, such as the chicane, where pavements are made to jut out at intervals so as to narrow the road. That sensible and easy-to-live-with measure is the sort that we are looking forward to as part of the overall scheme in Market Harborough.

There is also the traffic throttle, where two lanes temporarily merge, and the rumble strip. Those of us who have driven a lot on motorways late at night know about the rumble strip. For instance, on the M1, the driver cannot nod off because every so often a rumble strip wakes him up. There are variable height bumps to keep the driver alert—that is another name for sleeping policemen.

I hope that we shall hear no silliness about the effectiveness of sleeping policemen, because no sensible driver should be speeding in a built-up area or on a country road. As we all know too well, whether we are driving in rural or built-up areas, a child can unexpectedly appear from around the corner.

Another of the improvements in Market Harborough is the movable traffic island, designed to wake up the regular driver, and the gateway, where the driver has to slow down as he passes through pairs of pillars. These experiments are thoroughly welcomed by all sensible, thinking drivers and pedestrians in town and country.

A significant feature in the campaign for road safety is that the Government's recent urban safety project estimated that if this Bill were already on the statute book, 15,000 accidents a year, which would have cost the community £175 million, could have been avoided, thus also avoiding much heartbreak and human anguish. There are many advantages in the Bill. It will reduce the number and severity of accidents in built-up areas and will help to reduce air and noise pollution. It will improve the urban street environment for non-motor users. It will reduce the car's dominance in a way that varies according to street type.

It is particularly important that, by what we do, we encourage a quieter and cleaner environment. It has been shown that the planting of trees can, apart from any other factors, introduce three positive environmental effects. Trees narrow the motorists's line of vision, making him drive more cautiously. They enhance the landscape and act as major consumers of carbon dioxide.

I hope that the Bill makes good progress. I cannot see that any hon. Member will object to it, although even a Bill drawn up by someone as skilled as my hon. Friend may need to be improved and added to in Committee. However, I am sure that it will go into Standing Committee and then on to the statute book.

If I have any criticism of the Bill, it is only that the Minister already has powers, which he is using in the six towns that I have named. I am anxious to see the existing trial strengthened, improved and fully used. My hon. Friend's Bill will assist in such a process. I congratulate my hon. Friend, I wish him well and I hope that his Bill will have a speedy passage through the House.

10.36 am

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on introducing such an imaginative and necessary Bill. It strikes a chord in me, because two issues propelled me into politics. One was the inadequacy of the education provision in the area in which I lived and the other was the hazard of traffic to children in the neighbourhood. We live on a main road and we accept the hazards which that presents, but at the back and the side of the house is a fairly quiet side turning and a square in which children used to be able to play normally and happily. A rather canny motorist discovered that this was a rat run that enabled him to avoid the traffic on the main road. Others followed, and as a result children who had been happily playing there faced a sudden and unexpected hazard.

The two-year saga of persuading the local authority and the police to do something about this side road and quiet square that would protect the children playing there convinced me that, if one wanted to get anything done, one had to get on the inside track and become a member of that local authority. That ultimately brought me to this House. Therefore, the issue with which the Bill deals is close to my heart.

There are several aspects of this short Bill. They include safety, to which I shall draw attention, and the aesthetic environment, as it will do much to improve the quality of life, particularly in cities but also in many rural communities where traffic is becoming an unacceptable hazard and nuisance.

My constituency has two notable features that the Bill will quickly affect. First, it lies on the route from Kent and south-east England, through south London, and into central London. As the commuter traffic and heavy goods traffic funnels through that bottleneck into central London, the build-up becomes intense. In the morning, the radial roads are almost impassable. That represents a hazard to those who are driving, and especially to pedestrians and residents. In particular, it is a hazard to young children, who are so much part of my constituency.

I have said on other occasions that we have no industries in Dulwich except the education industry. We probably have more schools than any other constituency, by some geographical quirk. Throughout my time as a member of the Greater London council and as a Member of this place, it has always been of great concern to me and my constituents that something should be done to ensure the safety of young children on their way to school in the early morning and on their return in mid-afternoon, which are times when traffic is either at its height or is beginning to build up.

[Mr. Gerald Bowden]

On many occasions, when addressing public meetings —I am sure that what I am about to describe has been experienced by other hon. Members—I have faced authorities that have been unwilling to respond to problems and hazards, or have perhaps been indifferent to them. How many times have we heard the phrase, "Nothing will be done until someone is killed"? To introduce a scheme after someone has been killed, often a scheme that could have been introduced and implemented in the first place, is a terrible epitaph.

Over the past few years, I have seen a number of schemes come into being. I pay tribute to the Metropolitan police traffic division, to Southwark council, to other traffic authorities and to the Department of Transport, which have taken note of problems and assisted in introducing schemes. For example, the refuge in Grove vale is of great assistance to the children who have to cross that busy road on their way to Grove Vale school. It has been of great benefit to them and has given great reassurance to parents, who have been worried about their children making the crossing.

Court lane is a residential road in which many young children live. In other circumstances, their parents would feel happy to allow them to go to school alone. However, before the introduction of road humps, they felt that it was necessary to accompany their children to ensure that they took full account of the problems that confronted them. The introduction of road humps in Court lane has calmed the traffic there and has persuaded motorists who would otherwise have cut through the area by using the road to avoid the main road traffic to think again. That has been of great benefit and value to those who live in Court lane. Their anxieties have been alleviated.

I suggest that the Bill has relevance to several other problems that are still outstanding in my constituency and remain under consideration. First, there is the south circular road, in which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and his Department took an interest a year or so ago. I am delighted that, following strong representations from the local community, myself and the council, we have succeeded in persuading the powers that be that there should be no major upgrading of the road to make it more than a local feeder road. It will not become a major orbital route. That has been of some reassurance to the children who cross the road to go to school.

There has been a particular hazard for those who go to Dulwich college. Some of the college's boarding houses and its preparatory school are on one side of the road, and the school itself is on the other. It is a road along which much heavy traffic speeds while children seek to cross it at the traffic lights. Often the children have decided to cross this road at places other than the traffic lights. That may not be advisable, but children are children. Consideration is being given—I hope that the Bill will speed up the process—to ways in which conditions can be improved for children who have to make the crossing.

One of the earliest examples of traffic calming was introduced by the estates governors of Dulwich. It was about 200 years ago that they introduced their tollgate in College road, which has had a calming effect because it touches the pocket. Unfortunately, the calming effect was no match for modern technology. The tollkeeper suffered severe injury as a result of irresponsible traffic passing through, and the system was temporarily closed.

When the tollgate was temporarily suspended, traffic immediately built up, because motorists realised that they could pass along College road without paying or having to slow down at the tollgate. It was reinstated for an experiment, and there is now a wide-ranging debate within the constituency generally, but particularly among those who live nearby, adjacent to College road, on whether the tollgate should be reinstated and on the sort of charge that would deter those who might otherwise slip through.

Not far from the south circular road and College road is Dulwich village. At a crossroads is Dulwich Hamlet school, which is a junior school, and part of the Dulwich Village primary school, which is divided on two sites. One part of the school is on one side of the road that is known as Dulwich village and the other part is on the other side. Children have to cross the road at certain times of the day, which they do under close supervision.

No one can fault the responsible and serious approach that the teaching staff take when the crossing is made, but account has to be taken of the impatient driver who is driving through Dulwich village at a point where five busy roads meet. There is Court lane, which has been calmed slightly by the introduction of road humps. There is Carlton avenue, in which other experimental measures have been taken to try to calm the traffic. There are also Burbage road and Dulwich village. All these roads are used by through-running commuter traffic, sometimes including heavy goods vehicles.

Consideration must be given to how we can deal with this crisis point. I believe that the Bill offers an opportunity for parents of children at Dulwich Hamlet school and Dulwich Village school to alleviate their anxieties. That will be possible if the provisions in the Bill are implemented in their area.

Alleyn park and Alleyn road are two residential roads which have been discovered by commuters coming into London from the south-east. I have no fear that, in mentioning them today, I am opening an opportunity for those who might not know about them, since traffic-calming measures—humps and pinch points—have been introduced experimentally in both. Alleyn park is used by many small children who go to Dulwich college preparatory school, adjacent to which is Kingsdale school.

Even for a responsible motorist driving along the road, it is worrying to see the hazards that present themselves. There are other drivers who are exceeding the speed limit as they try impatiently to make up time while children are either alighting from cars or arriving on foot, with all the attendant difficulties. The problem in Alleyn park must be examined in the context of the Bill as we try to solve it.

I am mindful also of the James Allen's girls' school in East Dulwich grove, which is attended by many children who come from some distance from the area. Some arrive by car and others by coach. They have to be deposited in the proximity of the school—sometimes outside the gates and sometimes close by. Alleyn's school is in the same area and has similar problems. The hazards at school arrival and departure times are intense in those locations.

South Croxted road runs along the border between Dulwich and Lambeth. At its junction with Thurlow Park road is Oakfield school, where young children arrive and depart. Their parents are concerned because cars move off quickly just as the traffic lights change, or even jump the

lights as they are turning red. Their anxiety is apparent on their faces as they wait with their children to cross the road. As a parent, I could never be happy about allowing a child to cross such a road on his own. Children need to be accompanied until they reach full maturity. The opportunity to cross such roads on their own may be part of the growing-up process for children, but the hazards are simply too great to allow it in these circumstances.

I am currently dealing with the problem of Wood vale, a road which separates my borough of Southwark from Lewisham. The road runs through both my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples). It is used as a major cut-through road by commuter traffic trying to make a south-east and then an east-west movement into London. Its width and its length tempt traffic to speed, and it has no traffic lights. Although a residential road, it is fast becoming a major through-traffic route. That is a hazard to children.

There is also the additional problem that homes for the elderly and for the blind are situated along that road, and the hazard that that presents does not bear thinking about. The problem is currently being discussed between myself, the Metropolitan police and the Southwark and Lewisham councils. We have to find some way of alleviating the problems.

I have cited specific places in my constituency where incidents have occurred and where the threat of more exists. I take great heart from the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre has introduced a Bill which has the wholehearted support of the House, and which deserves the wholehearted support of all who care about the safety of our citizens, our constituents and, especially, our children.

10.52 am

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), who is known as a most assiduous constituency Member of Parliament. Much of what he said about his constituency struck a chord with me, thinking about my own constituency. He spoke about the great need in many areas for the calming of traffic. The word "calming" is in the title of the Bill, and it is significant that such a word had to be used. It brings to mind an image of traffic having a malignant life of its own and needing to be calmed.

When I am sitting in a traffic jam, I sometimes ask myself how one would define "traffic". To me in my car, everyone else is traffic and therefore a nuisance. However, everyone else sitting in their cars must mutter to themselves. "Traffic—what a nuisance it is." Traffic is everyone else.

London and most of our other towns and cities were not originally laid out for traffic. When the Romans arrived here, they had no idea of the internal combustion engine; their thoughts were more concerned with chariots and similar forms of transport. Many of our problems today stem from the way in which towns and cities were laid out.

Why does traffic speed whenever it can? Of course, very often it cannot speed because it is stuck in a traffic jam, but when it can, it does. That is when traffic-calming measures are most likely to be needed. Modern traffic is driven by the internal combustion engine. When it first arrived on the scene 100 years ago, no one dreamed that it could be not only a great boon and a benefit for most people, but the most dreadful nuisance.

The internal combustion engine should not be allowed at all in our towns and cities. It can be extremely noisy, especially when it is in fast cars driven by young men. It is also a terrible polluter. Speaking on behalf of asthmatics everywhere, I can tell hon. Members how distressing it is to walk around our towns and cities when the weather is calm, still and cold—as it was a few weeks ago—and there is a smog of traffic pollution.

On the other hand, what was it like before the internal combustion engine, when people travelled with the aid of the horse? Now, we tend to think of the horse as an environmentally friendly creature, but in the days when there were hundreds and thousands of horses everywhere, there must also have been stink and flies. People were employed as crossing sweepers and they would watch for someone waiting across the road. There were piles of manure everywhere, and they would sweep it out of the way so that people could cross.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Summerson: I give way to the hon. Gentleman, although doubtless unwisely.

Mr. Banks: I am a little older than the hon. Gentleman, and I can remember London when horses were used for many purposes, although not in the numbers that he mentioned. He might be interested to know that a young fellow such as I could make a pretty penny collecting buckets of horse manure and selling it to the neighbours to use for fertilising their roses. It was not all bad.

Mr. Summerson: That was an excellent idea. I am not at all surprised to hear that the hon. Gentleman sold manure to his neighbours specifically to fertilise roses—no doubt, the redder the better. Manure can be used for other things, such as to fertilise the vegetable patch. Horse manure in its raw state is not terribly good for roses, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman killed his neighbour's blooms.

I support the Bill and hope that it can be used in conjunction with other measures. Should traffic be prevented from entering towns and cities? I also think that an increase in the number of flyovers for both traffic and pedestrians would be helpful. Roads have mixed uses—all too often, people simply want to get from one side to the other, but they cannot because of the traffic. The traffic then has to be held up, which is annoying. There should be pedestrian flyovers with an escalator at each side and a bridge over the road so that people can cross safely and the traffic move freely. I accept that the flyovers would not be beautiful, but they would be practical and popular.

There should be more flyovers for traffic. The Hogarth flyover at Chiswick does not look very good, and it probably did not cost a great deal to erect, but it is effective in keeping the traffic moving. Humps cost a great deal of money—I will not use the word "resources"; I am thinking of mounting a one-man campaign against its use. When we mean money, why do we not say so?

Humps have other disadvantages. They are noisy for those who live near them. One hears the roaring of the car's engine, the squealing of its brakes, the thump as the vehicle hits the hump, and another roar as the driver

[Mr. Summerson]

accelerates away—often to the accompaniment of screeching tyres. The whole process is repeated a hundred yards down the road.

Humps are also extremely uncomfortable for cyclists. I sometimes encounter one notorious hump on my way home. If I am forced a little way out from the kerb, I find myself almost airborne. That is very bad for my bicycle, and extremely bad for me. As has been said, humps also present difficulties to emergency vehicles. I am not against them in principle, but they should be used in conjunction with other methods of traffic calming.

Many people are concerned about the speed of traffic today. Cars speed along Queen's road and nearby residential roads in my constituency. Constituents have asked me to intercede with the local council, to help to ensure that some form of traffic calming is introduced, because they fear for their safety and that of their children. That is just the kind of area where calming meaures ought to be introduced soon.

Although Walthamstow is part of Greater London, it is also a town. If you, Madam Deputy Speaker, visited Walthamstow, you would enjoy the experience immensely. I could show you the centre of Walthamstow village, with its charming 15th-century church and old, half-timbered houses. It is a lovely quiet area, but when traffic rushes through, its peace and tranquillity are destroyed. Some steps have been taken, but its residents are still concerned.

Also in my constituency are the two major traffic arteries of Forest road and Lea Bridge road. They are heavily used by vehicles travelling between London and Essex. Traffic-calming measures are needed there also, but in conjunction with other techniques to ensure that traffic can keep moving. If I may mix my metaphors, they are bottlenecks as well as arteries. If flyovers of the kind that I mentioned could be introduced, through traffic could keep moving and that would benefit all who live along those routes.

Buses are one of the best inventions of the 19th century. The more we have, the better. We need more bus lanes, and traffic lights specifically to control them. I am sure that, if the public could count on catching a bus without waiting too long—and knowing that it would be warm and comfortable, the fare would be reasonable, and the bus would keep moving—more and more people would use buses.

I attack those selfish, inconsiderate and stupid people who park in bus lanes. Buses ought to be fitted with extra-heavy bumpers to drive such vehicles out of the way, so that the buses can keep moving. Bus passengers would be far calmer if they knew that they would keep moving.

I want to put in a plug for buses on routes 38 and 55 in my constituency, which once provided a through route from there into the west end. Alas, they no longer do so. Local people want those through routes reinstated, and so do I. If more buses were on our roads, there would be less need for traffic-calming measures.

We could also have more trams. How I like the trams when we go to Blackpool for our party conference. I most look forward not to the long and boring speeches in the conference hall, but to boarding the trams and rumbling along the promenade.

Traffic lights are supposed to control junctions, but it seems that their timing is often deliberately used to slow the pace of traffic. Lights should be used to control road junctions or to ensure pedestrian safety, but not to slow traffic. Heaven knows that traffic does not move all that fast anyway. All traffic light timings should be set to the speed of cyclists. That would encourage more people to get on their bikes.

More and more people are taking to using bicycles, and quite right too. I welcome the Government's announcement of 1,000 miles of cycle routes in London. That is a good thing, for the more that people take to their bikes, the better. Cycling is good for one. It is healthy, gets one out and about, and allows one to see things. It is a much more unselfish form of personal transport than getting into a car and causing noise and pollution. I am one of the London Members of Parliament who have been asked to do a three-minute spot on Greater London Radio, when I shall raise the subject of cycling. I will also be talking to someone from Friends of the Earth, which I know much supports cycling.

I want to give one or two words of warning to cyclists. I wish that they would use lights at night. People who ride bicycles without lights and who do not wear bright clothing pose a great danger and are asking for trouble. They must ensure that their bikes are properly illuminated.

On a miscellaneous point, where there is an arrangement of two or three parallel traffic lanes, that on the left should never be marked with an arrow indicating that vehicles in it can only turn left. That arrangement can make life extremely difficult for the cyclist who wants to move off straight ahead. If he stays in the left-hand lane, he faces the prospect of being carved up by any vehicles that want to turn left. If he moves to the middle, some idiot in the left-hand lane will decide to drive off straight ahead.

As to the future, I hope that city vehicles will all be electrically powered. That would be more environmentally friendly and quieter—and safer, because the speed of electric vehicles could be strictly governed. I hope that we will be able to ban the infernal internal combustion engine from our towns and cities and adopt instead quiet and safe methods of transport. Above all, let us have calm traffic.

11.8 am

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): It gives me great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), who made another of the usual inventive contributions that have marked his first term as Member of Parliament for Walthamstow. I am sure that it will be followed by many successive terms. If my hon. Friend's constituents have any regard for work rate and the diligence with which they are represented, they will substantially increase his majority.

My hon. Friend mentioned the "infernal internal combustion engine". He said that no one realised what the dangers were. My hon. Friend and I are probably two of the few hon. Members who realise where the first recorded pedestrian fatality took place. It was in my constituency, outside the speech hall of Harrow school, where my hon. Friend was educated. There is a brass plaque there to record it.

Ms. Ruddock: His education?

Mr. Hughes: Just in case there is any doubt, the plaque records the pedestrian fatality. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) for helping me to make that clear.

I have high hopes for the Bill. Would not it be marvellous if we could hope for a brass plaque somewhere recording the last pedestrian fatality? It is a serious matter. We are talking about tragedies affecting individual families. Over the years, it has become clear that a proportion of such tragedies—probably a large proportion—is entirely avoidable. It is scandalous that we know that some of the deaths are avoidable yet nothing is done.

I warmly welcome the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) has shown great skill in bringing it before the House in its present form. My hon. Friend showed skills of diplomacy that one would not necessarily have expected of a former bomber pilot in seeking to settle what appeared to be an argument between my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) and me. I can report that, in a sedentary conversation, my hon. Friend and I managed to clear up our argument. We concluded that both of us were right, which is always a comfortable conclusion to an argument, and that some traffic engineers and national bodies were very good and forward-looking whereas others were not. Perhaps we should recommend that those who sit on selection committees in borough councils and have to select new borough engineers ask the engineers their views on traffic calming.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) made an interesting reference to the remarks of the vice-chairman of the relevant committee of the Association of District Councils, Councillor Drury, who said of traffic-calming measures, "The average motorist will hate them." I am sure that Mr. Drury is at least partly right. Some motorists will hate them. But that begs the question: on whose behalf and in whose interests do we seek to introduce traffic-calming measures? Who comes first?

In 1980, I had recently been elected in a by-election to the GLC to represent Croydon, Central. A Greater London council traffic engineer had invented an ingenious scheme. To stop a rat run, he had simply reversed the direction of a short one-way road, thus making it impossible for motorists to avoid the intersection at the bottom of Gravel hill which people had hitherto sought to avoid. I received a huge number of letters of objection from people in Farnborough and other parts of Surrey and Kent—in fact, from anywhere except an address in that little road.

In those days, Croydon, Central was a relatively marginal seat so I was not particularly impressed, although I was impressed by what those living in the road said. They told me that people had been run over and that residents had not been able to get their cars out of their driveways in the morning because of the traffic jams. Their interests were paramount and even if the letters of objection had come from another part of my constituency —I can say this now that I no longer represent the area —I should have accepted the serious point that the people whose views should be taken into consideration are the people living in the road in question. We must consider the effect on their quality of life and the safety of their children. The Bill seeks to address that central question.

As I said in my intervention, the problem is that some traffic engineers have sought to clutch at straws in arguing against traffic-calming measures. They tell us that road humps are a hazard. I think that it was 1984 when my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development, then Minister of State for Transport, first introduced the parent legislation. The regulations have been changed subsequently. From my GLC files and my files from this place, I could produce an interesting chronology to show how traffic engineers set out their precise objections and how the Government met those objections in new regulations, only to find the traffic engineers raising new objections.

Take, for example, the objection that road humps are a hazard. I can well recall what happened when I worked in Belfast for the BBC. I had never encountered road humps in this country and when I first found one, outside a police station, my hire car almost took off. The experience is extremely uncomfortable and I can assure the House that it happens only once. One gets used to traffic humps. I am pleased to tell the television licence holders that the car was a very nice Mercedes, which must have cost the BBC a great deal of money, so the experience was not as uncomfortable as it might have been. If people can get used to traffic humps in Belfast, there is no reason why they should not get used to them in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I have heard traffic engineers argue that traffic-calming measures and road humps are ugly, quite inappropriate or out of place. Those trivial arguments simply do not weigh in the scales against the loss of human life and the tragedy that will result in the absence of the measures.

The hon. Member for Deptford was right about money. No one should run away from that, but I believe that money is only the endgame in the long chess game played by people who do not want the measures in the first place. I promoted a private Member's Bill dealing with the safety of children's playgrounds and the rubber surfaces underneath play equipment. Local authority officers who did not want the measures in their playgrounds used money as the endgame, having argued previously that the measures were unnecessary and the benefits unproven. Local authority members and council committee chairmen never reached the point at which they sought to argue with their colleagues for a reasonable slice of the money. I do not run away from the argument about money, and I accept that if we have traffic-calming measures in some roads, there will automatically be a demand for them in others when their good effects are seen; but I do not believe that lack of money is preventing desirable traffic-calming measures from being introduced.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) will know that I often speak on local authority matters in the House and often mention the London borough of Islington. I think that today will be a first because I propose to mention it to praise it.

Mr. Tony Banks: Careful!

Mr. Hughes: All right, I shall mildly praise it. No, I shall properly praise it. The other day, I drove through a part of the borough which I think is called Barnsbury, although I do not know the borough at all well. I was diverted by the police off a main road because of a traffic accident and drove through this area. It has been transformed by the most sensitive use of gently gradiated humps at road junctions and gentle chicanes.

Mr. Summerson: I lived in Barnsbury for 12 years. The traffic scheme to which my hon. Friend refers was introduced at the time when Islington had a Conservative-controlled council.

Mr. Hughes: I am most impressed to hear that. The people in that area will be grateful for what has been done. The effects have benefited the whole community.

Parts of my constituency would also benefit from traffic-calming measures. The problem is that if one lists areas that would benefit from them, inevitably one misses out a whole host of others. People then wonder why one did not bother to refer to them. I have already referred to the road that runs through Harrow-on-the-Hill past Harrow school. Cars travel at fast speeds down the high street, which is a narrow, winding road. I have seen cars going down the hill at least 50 mph, if not faster. Boys from Harrow school are crossing the road at all times of the day. At Dulwich it is different. The boys there move from one part of the school to another at fixed times of the day.

The boys from Harrow school take great care. However, due to the work that is going on in Harrow town centre at Roxborough bridge, the amount of traffic has increased. Far too many cars are parked there, so visibility is difficult. The winding nature of the road adds to that difficulty. The road is a prime candidate for traffic-calming measures. I suspect that almost none of the cars that would be slowed down by traffic-calming measures are owned by people who live in the London borough of Harrow. It is the people who abuse the privilege of visiting the London borough of Harrow who cause so much nuisance and danger in the high street of Harrow-on-the-Hill.

Another problem affects Paines lane, Pinner. That was an ancient track which developed into a small road. It has been discovered by heavy lorries coming into Pinner from the Uxbridge road. Paines lane is completely unsuitable for heavy lorries. Width restrictions in particular would greatly protect the people who live in Paines lane and the historic high street in Pinner, which also suffers—it is a continuatition of Paines lane. The surrounding area would be enormously improved if traffic-calming measures were introduced in Paines lane.

Mr. Tony Banks: The hon. Gentleman describes a situation that most of us recognise from our constituency experience. What does he think about the old Greater London council's lorry ban? I cannot remember whether he supported it. I do not know whether he will be able to get his side in the few weeks left to it, to do something about restoring the GLC lorry ban.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I was about to deal with that very point. My GLC friends and I supported in principle the GLC lorry ban, but in Committee I moved an amendment dealing with the ban. One problem is that certain people have to be exempted; they have to be able to get on with their business. Eventually, not many lorries were banned. Almost every heavy lorry displays a sticker, either a GLC lorry ban exemption sticker or the new London boroughs exemption sticker. I do not criticise the introduction of that measure, but it was not as effective as it might have been. The amendment that I moved would have enabled a lorry ban to be enforced in specific roads. None of us would object to lorries running all night on certain major trunk roads. Everybody, however, would object to heavy lorries going down Paines lane. A lorry ban that specified that lorries were banned from certain roads between certain hours would make a far more effective contribution to people's welfare and quality of life. More work by hon. Members, perhaps on a cross-party basis, is needed.

Ms. Ruddock: I am most interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. The Labour party has already adopted a policy that would designate lorry routes. We are following the example of many other European countries. We believe that designated lorry routes would make a real contribution to traffic-calming measures.

Mr. Hughes: I am delighted to hear that; it makes sense. I am delighted to know that the hon. Lady is considering taking these measures down to local level. As she will not, however, be given the opportunity to carry out that policy, I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic has heard the point that she made.

There are different sorts of roads where different traffic-calming measures can make a great contribution. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre has introduced a wide, enabling Bill. That is the best part of it. No hon. Member wants to be told what should be done in his or her constituency. Local residents and tenants' associations know precisely what they want to achieve. They know what is needed far better than borough council officers or even their Member of Parliament. The fact that this is an enabling Bill will enable a borough or any other kind of council to ensure that the right traffic-calming measures are introduced.

Friends of the Earth wrote to hon. Members who have shown an interest in these issues and asked us to introduce such a Bill if we were successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills. I was surprised to receive a proposition from Friends of the Earth with which I so thoroughly agreed and which was so very well thought through. The organisation targeted correctly the Members of Parliament that it thought would support the Bill. I am glad that it found the right target when it contacted my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre. Despite the fact that little time is left to us in this Parliament, I hope that the Bill will have a speedy passage and that it will reach the statute book without amendment.

11.29 am

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): I am sure you will agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that Friday morning debates are normally quiet, but occasionally they reveal gems and surprises. I was somewhat startled to hear of the early age at which my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) allowed himself to be seduced by the market economy. I shall be interested to hear whether my hon. Friend's neighbours, the beneficiaries of his activities, put his name forward for the young entrepreneur of the year award or the young environmentalist of the year award. However, in view of the nature of my hon. Friend's activities, perhaps they were reluctant to get close enough to him to secure his assent to the nomination.

I want to give some celtic support to the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). So far, the debate has been a home counties affair, but we all understand that our colleagues who represent other parts of the country have constituency commitments today. However, the Bill is as relevant to Scotland, Wales and the north of England as it is to the home counties. I understand that hon. Members who represent London

experience the problems we share on a far greater scale than we, fortunately, have to contend with in our communities.

The Bill is attempting to engineer out the shortcomings of human nature. It is trying to deal with the problems caused by the selfishness, stupidity and aggressiveness of motorists. We are trying to find engineering devices that will suppress those characteristics which we all see and which, if we are honest, at different times we all share as drivers.

It is appalling to think that, every single week, eight children die on our roads. That means that eight families will never recover from the horror of the accidents. We are delighted that the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) contributed to the debate. He said that he did not understand why some of the problems existed, because many drivers are also parents. However, the hon. Gentleman, in his generosity towards parents, overlooked the fact that we have a great capacity to compartmentalise our roles. At one moment we can think as parents or pedestrians about road safety, but, half an hour later, we can have a completely different perspective in our commuting role.

Nowadays, jumping the red light has become the practice, not the exception. There is nothing sadder than to see on such cars a sticker on the back window which says "Caution—child on board". That message is intended just for the weekends or the evening, because that same motorist will jump the red light in his rush to get a fraction ahead in the queue on his way to work.

When we are on the roads, we all believe that the idiot is the one in the other car. The Bill would attempt to devise ways in which to suppress and limit the idiocy in all of us once we get behind the wheel of a car. When one gets into a car, one steps into a self-centred, introverted, competitive cocoon, in which one thinks differently from when one is on the pavement. Similarly, we think differently when we discuss the problems of road safety in the abstract in the Chamber.

Stupidities are not practised only by the motorist. I suspect that many hon. Members have shared my anger when I see a parent at the side of the road, safely on the pavement, pushing a push chair or a pram part way into the road while they are waiting to cross. Stupidity is not entirely confined to motorists—although, justifiably, they can claim the lion's share of it.

My county highway authority has written to me to express its support for the Bill. In that letter, the director of environment and highways makes the following relevant point:

> "One of the things we are finding is that our ability to introduce 20 mph speed zones in residential areas are extremely limited by the complex procedures that have to be followed, and all the necessary paraphernalia of road narrowings, humps, chicanes and the like. This is not to mention the considerable cost involved, and the need to obtain Secretary of State's consent on each and every occasion."

I hope that the Minister will consider the role that the Department of Transport could play in expediting action once the Bill has concluded its passage, by some accelerated route, through both Houses.

When one tries to engineer out the shortcomings of the motorist, it is important to ensure that they fear the enforcement of the law. The other day, I was driving in south London through a slightly modified form of gateway, where the cars went through the limited centre section, with a bus lane on the near side. There was no barrier across that gateway as there is on those that are intended to prevent access except for fire engines. There were three cars going through the centre section and the two drivers behind me saw it as a great opportunity to get ahead in the queue. They shot through in the bus lane in the knowledge that no one could do anything about it. Even when we have something as categorical as a red light, motorists blatantly ignore it.

In my constituency, a recent tragic case involved an elderly driver who was killed when a young driver shot the lights. In another appalling incident, a bus driven by someone from, I am sad to say, my part of the country, killed someone when the driver went through a traffic light when he arrived at the London end of the motorway.

Of all the bad practices that have developed in motoring, nothing is more dangerous than the practice of jumping the red light. About a year ago, in a debate on road safety, I said that one of the ways I alleviated the tedium of driving in and out of the House every morning was to count the cars who jumped the red light. Such behaviour has now ceased to be the exception—it is almost practice, as not just one, but several following cars jump the red light. Accidents are averted only because drivers waiting at the lights are now becoming increasingly nervous about moving off straight on the green: one must watch for the idiot at the crossroads.

Problems are exacerbated by the sheer lack of awareness and ignorance of the highway code. I know that this issue is an old chestnut, but at some stage we must accept that we need to make the non-mechanistic part of the driving test more rigorous. It is all well and good for people to learn by rote to change gear and about the mechanical aspects of driving, but it is also important that, at the most receptive stage—when people want to learn because they want the end product of access to driving a car on the road—good habits and practices, which are inculcated in the highway code are enforced on people who will probably be let loose on the roads until they reach the age of 70.

The problem of enforcement also means that we must ensure that magistrates exercise their power to punish motorists appropriately. As well as making the driving licence more difficult to obtain, it is important to make it more difficult to retain for people whose licence has been suspended. I am glad that there are moves in that direction.

We cannot alter human nature. We can only try to restrict it by the mechanical and engineering methods described by the hon. Member for Wyre, and to limit it by the use of sanctions, which means that the courts also have their role to play.

11.29 am

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): This is an entirely sensible use of parliamentary time on a Friday morning. So often, the Friday morning slot is taken up with some grand design or pet theory of a Back Bencher—if only the universe could be changed, it would be a better place; if the world were flat people would not fall off it; if some amendment could be made to humanity, human beings would behave better.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) has chosen a different route to make sense of his moment of parliamentary time. In a few words, by making some small

[Mr. Dudley Fishburn]

and explicit changes to the law, he will change the way in which millions of people feel about their environment, the street in front of their homes and their community. He is to be praised enormously for that.

The Bill is a modest 35 lines. One of the curses of parliamentary life is that we pass far too much legislation. In the past few years, legislation passed has reached ever greater records, in length and often in incomprehensibility. This Bill will set the law for England and Scotland in 35 lines—indeed, it changes the law in England in a modest 20 lines.

I wish that I could pretend that the Bill was entirely comprehensible, but it is not. These wonderful words appear at the beginning of line 5:

"5 1.—(1) In section 62 of the Highways Act 1980 (general power of improvement) in subsection (3) (description of works for which specific powers are given and to which the general power does not apply) after paragraph (ff) there shall be inserted—

'(fg)'".

That is the legislative nonsense behind which lie real changes in the way our streets will look—not immediately, but after some years—as a result of this legislation.

If I have been cruel in pointing out one of the more incomprehensible passages, I commend my hon. Friend for the simple lines in the Bill, including line 25, which I am sure will be effective and which state:

"(a) for the words '39' there shall be inserted the words '39C'".

If my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre is able to change our legislation with such simplicity, he deserves commendation.

In legislative terms, the Bill clears up the law. During the past few years, local authorities have been uncertain about what they could and could not do. People with the best intentions of calming traffic, improving the environment and making the urban landscape feel more friendly to residents, have been hindered by that uncertainty. That is why traffic-calming measures have almost been reduced to the single method of road humps, which are unsatisfactory, as has been pointed out repeatedly in the debate.

As I understand it, the Bill allows local authorities the choice of a range of methods to calm traffic and it allows them to do so in the knowledge that the law is behind them and is clear. They will not continually have to look over their shoulders for the possibility of a lawsuit or the Secretary of State for the Environment not approving their scheme. As a result of this legislation, which we trust will speed through the other place as fast as it passes through the House, local authorities will be able to say yes to availability of forms of traffic calming in their areas. They will be able to have a chicane, or a road narrowing, or to plant a tree. They will be able to use a variety of methods, and new ones will be invented to calm traffic as a result of the Bill.

The Bill will be especially welcome in my constituency. I represent the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, where about 100,000 people live; yet every day, well over 1 million people pass through that slice of our great international city. The area was partly built in the 18th century and was almost finished by the end of the 19th century. All the roads were certainly in place by the turn of this century. The huge increase in the flow of people to and fro—like some massive tide—alters the residential feel of the heart of our capital.

About 70 per cent. of Kensington is a conservation area. It is not merely the buildings but the environment which is held to be of special importance and to need special care. The mass of traffic passing through the area is not merely a pollutant but takes a daily toll of the fabric of the great historical centre of our city.

Many residents in Kensington would seek only to change the title of the Bill from the Traffic Calming Bill to the "Traffic Euthanasia Bill". As my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) and for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) have said, many traffic-calming schemes annoy people from outside the area, where they are imposed but are fully supported by residents. The fact that we shall be able to impose a variety of different schemes in Kensington will be greatly appreciated.

Some time ago I introduced the Street Furniture Design and Planning Bill, which was intended to clear up some of the clutter which makes such a mess of London and of other United Kingdom cities. Like all sensible measures, with the exception of this Bill, it got nowhere, but at least it aired the widespread feeling that London is a long way behind best practice to be found in Europe and elsewhere in the design of our city and the things which are plonked down on our pavements and streets.

When studying the extraordinary range of mess in our streets, I was aware that the Department of Transport and local authority traffic departments are perhaps the worst culprits, putting up many messy, bossy signs to control traffic and to calm it.

If the Bill introduces practical measures to slow down the flow of traffic in residential areas, such as narrowing streets and planting trees in the middle of roads, the need for all those metal signs and bits of flashing bossiness will be diminished; that will have a knock-on effect on the appearance of our city environment.

The Bill passes through the House at a convenient and sensible time because it will be noted by the commission led by Dame Jennifer Jenkins, which is studying the use of London's royal parks. The commission will have studied especially the flow of traffic through the royal parks in the centre of London and outside. This Bill will allow it to make recommendations on a much wider range of traffic control. As hundreds of thousands of Londoners use the royal parks every day, that will improve their quality of life. I hope that the commission will look into the possibilities opened up by the Bill once it receives Royal Assent.

We have rightly heard much about the need to encourage bicycles in the centre of London. London is a largely flat city for which the bicycle is tailor made, and I would do anything to encourage cycling in London, especially in the royal parks, where cycling can be encouraged through the creation of cycle routes and where, as a result of the Bill, the mass of traffic can be made to flow more smoothly where desired and yet be restricted where it is not.

The Bill will not simply encourage cyclists or even discourage motorists but will exclude motorists from areas where a great number of cars are not required. One of its effects will be to encourage pedestrians. London is made for pedestrian life. In many of the world's great cities, pedestrians are regarded as freaks. If people try to walk a

few blocks in Los Angeles, they will be picked up by the police force for loitering. It is unthinkable that a Californian should put on shoes to walk. He may put them on to walk to the car, but that is their only use.

However, shoe leather is the best form of transport in London. As the Bill makes our residential streets calmer, people will begin to find walking more attractive, easier and safer. To go from one end of my constituency to another takes less than 30 minutes by foot, but it can easily take longer by car.

As we improve residential areas, parks and green spaces, cut down the thrust of traffic where it should not be, implement some of the schemes that have been suggested today on both sides of the House, and encourage traffic to go along predesignated routes, we shall take a substantial step toward creating a more pleasant London. This is a national Bill, which will apply to all cities in the kingdom, but I speak for London, the residents of which will have good cause to be thankful for this morning's debate and for the Bill.

11.55 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I agree with virtually everything that the hon. Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) said, which will surprise him as much as it surprises me. This is a morning for agreement on an excellent Bill.

Pedestrianism and people's willingness to walk should be a matter of choice. In my area, people often have to walk because they are waiting for a bus that has not arrived. If we are to improve the lot of pedestrians, we should start immediately by setting an example outside the Palace of Westminster by pedestrianising the whole of Parliament square.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): Except for Members of Parliament.

Mr. Banks: I do not think that we should exempt ourselves. I am sure that we can find ways to deal with problems that may arise. The weight of traffic makes it difficult to gain access to that lovely bit of green in Parliament square and once one is there it is not a pleasant place to be. We took readings of lead levels and emission gases from exhausts and the readings were most unpleasant. The hon. Member for Kensington talks about the quality of life in London, and we should deal with some of those problems.

Mr. Mans: I entirely agree that the situation outside the House is appalling. Extensive use of traffic-calming measures, perhaps not totally inhibiting some vehicles, would not only benefit people in the vicinity but create a much better impression for tourists and others visiting this great city.

Mr. Banks: That is an eminently sensible suggestion. When the Bill is in Committee we may be able to consider it and make a few interesting amendments. The Bill is excellent and I was pleased that the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) asked me to be a sponsor. I apologise to him and the House for arriving late, but there was a reason for it. I am wearing a finger stool not to prevent me from picking my nose—it would not make much difference because I pick my nose with my right hand—but because I am taking part in a small experiment to register the stress levels attendant on being a Member of Parliament. I am carrying behind me a monitor and some pads on my nipples are registering my heartbeat as I face, with fraught expectation, the possibility of addressing this packed House on such a controversial measure. I hope that the evidence that we gather from the experiment will reinforce any additional claim for higher payments among Members of Parliament because of the high stress levels that we must endure in doing our job. It is wholly appropriate that I should be having my stress levels measured while making a speech on traffic calming.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) is unfortunately not in his place, but I shall answer his question for the record. He asked me about the history of my horse manure collection in Brixton many years ago. Yes, it was to try to earn some money. It was an early brush with capitalism, but, given the fact that I used to receive only 6d for a bucket of horse manure—for those young Conservative Members present, that is 2½p in today's decimal currency—I soon lost my love and affection for capitalism and realised how exploitative it was. That is why I now sit on this side of the House. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West would fully appreciate that collecting horse manure is wonderful training for going into politics.

It is interesting to see Conservative Members—and Opposition Members, I suppose—using this opportunity to raise issues of concern to their constituents. It is no mere coincidence that Conservative Members from very marginal constituencies in London have been taking this opportunity to address their constituents via the House of Commons. The hon. Members for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) and for Kensington will need an awful lot more than road humps and chicanes to save them at the general election. Chicanery rather than chicanes may assist them. However, they made some good points and we have all had those experiences within our constituencies.

Experiences are a good basis on which to make comments in the House. After the tests had been carried out on me this morning, I took a taxi along Regent street and could see the problems of London all around me. They were not unusual; one of the large stores was having a facelift and its front was being cleaned of pigeon manure, which is not as eminently collectable as horse manure, as one does not receive much money for it and it takes more effort to collect it. To clean the building, a large hoist had been erected which was occupying one lane of Regent street. The lane had been coned off.

It was obviously convenient for the store owner to have the building cleaned on Friday morning rather than Sunday morning or Saturday, but it meant that the rest of us travelling along Regent street were inconvenienced. Too many people in London act as it suits them and inconvenience other road users.

I hope that the Minister will give us the precise position of the Government's policy on the renting of road space by developers, and tell us how it is progressing and what effect we can expect. All sorts of people seem to have the right to dig up London streets and lay them back down, only to be followed by other organisations. There seems to be little co-ordination, which produces maximum inconvenience for Londoners travelling around, whether in cars, taxis, buses or bicycles. Several Conservative Members are cyclists; they should consider the fact that the patchwork quilt of work and potholes on the roads is dangerous, particularly to cyclists.

[Mr. Banks]

I have never known a time when London's roads were in as bad a condition. That is partly because the cash restrictions imposed on local authorities have meant that road maintenance has been rolled back. I see that the Minister for Roads and Traffic is shaking his head, but will he tell us why London streets are so bad? I am not imagining it. I am not making a cheap political point—I have other opportunities to do that. Everyone who uses London streets knows of their appalling condition and how dangerous they are for pedestrians and other road users, particularly cyclists.

In welcoming the Bill I shall mention a couple of facts that the Association of London Authorities has asked me to raise in the debate so that they can be placed on record. On behalf of the London Labour boroughs, the ALA welcomes the Bill, but it says that it is important that the regulations envisaged should not be so detailed as to stifle attempts by highway authorities to implement traffic-calming measures. It cites the fact that when the Department brought out the first set of regulations on road humps they were so restrictive that it was made virtually impossible to implement such schemes. I believe that we are now on the third set of Department of Transport regulations on road humps. In Committee we must consider how the Bill will be implemented and ensure that it is not too restrictive.

Mr. Mans: I realise that the hon. Gentleman was otherwise engaged earlier, but in my speech I made it clear that the regulations were very much in line with what the Association of London Authorities suggested. I think that the ALA used the expression "light touch", which is how I should like to see the measure implemented. The maximum amount of discretion should be given to local authorities to do what is best for their districts.

Mr. Banks: I apologise for raising issues which the hon. Gentleman has already covered. The ALA raises two other matters that have perhaps been dealt with. I do not wish to detain or unnecessarily bore the House, but one issue that the ALA mentioned was the number of traffic-calming measures that are already legal. It said that such measures included

"width restrictions (narrowings) to restrict heavy lorries"

but also said:

"on the basis of the 1984 Road Traffic Regulation Act, these are legal only for safety purposes or to improve the environment by restricting heavy lorries alone. A simple amendment would bring the law in line with the proposals in the Bill by allowing such measures to improve the environment generally."

I hope that the hon. Member for Wyre will consider that issue in Committee.

The matter of cash has already been mentioned. Local authorities will obviously be concerned about that.

Like other hon. Members, I wish to mention my constituency. I do so not out of the desperation that perhaps moves Conservative Members to think about the election, as, fortunately, Newham, North-West is one of the best Labour seats. I work hard and do not take the electors for granted, but I can contemplate the next Parliament with a little more certainty than some Conservative Members.

The London borough of Newham has many traffic problems. We can hardly expect anything else as Newham has the A11 and A13 running through it from east to west, dividing the borough into three strips of land. The scene is not very attractive, and anyone who has travelled along the A11 and A13 through the borough will know of our problems. The effect on the environment of such an enormous weight of traffic is dire. It is unhealthy to live alongside roads that carry the vast amount of traffic of the A11 and A13.

I do not blame motorists for trying to find ways around traffic jams by rat running, but we know the problems that that creates in side roads. Residents rightly complain to us about that, particularly in districts such as Forest Gate, Maryland and Stratford. There are particular rat-running problems off the Leytonstone road, where there are many schools, thus creating dangers for residents of that district. Many demands are made on the borough to implement traffic-calming schemes and any additional power and resources that we can give it to do so, via the Bill, will be welcome by Newham residents.

Road humps and width restrictions do not prevent traffic from passing along roads, although they may restrict it. The prospect of encountering humps on rat runs is still more attractive than being stuck in what I suppose is the ultimate traffic-calming measure—a gridlock that does not move. Such traffic jams are not calming for the drivers or those who live in the district. When someone is stuck in a traffic jam, his or her stress levels increase. The very thought of it has no doubt sent the machine on my back surging into the higher realms of machine tolerance. Road humps and restrictions do not address the main problem, which is that there are too many vehicles on London's roads. The best way to calm traffic, other than creating an enormous gridlock, is to remove as much traffic from the roads as possible. That is the issue we must address in the great conurbation of London.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) speaks on behalf of the Labour party—soon to be the government—I hope that she will say more about what the Labour party will do about traffic in London when it comes to government. Traffic is a big issue, although not the one on which the election will turn —no doubt, we shall be discussing the economy. However, among the many issues that interest Londoners, traffic and public transport will be two of the most important during the election. I know that, in her usual fashion, my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford will address that matter head on.

We need to attach far higher priority to public transport. It must be developed much more in London. We need more bus lanes and bus priority schemes, and we need them properly enforced. I am a fairly law-abiding citizen—in fact, I am very law abiding. Why should I undersell myself? I have a thing about bus lanes because I supported the GLC when it was implementing them in London. I therefore have an ideological attachment to bus lanes. It seems far more democratic that big red buses should go charging through with priority than that single people in cars should, so I always make sure that I keep out of bus lanes. It is very annoying—here goes the old monitor again—to see such cars steaming down the bus lane, and I find myself hoping that there is a policeman at the other end of it. Unfortunately, there rarely is. That is what is so maddening—people get away with it. Of course one is tempted to follow cars down the bus lanes, but I resist any temptation to break the law. I hope that the Labour Government will properly enforce additional bus lanes in London.

We also need to end the tax breaks for company cars. Far too much traffic enters London and we should dissuade companies from giving their employees cars by ending the tax breaks for such cars. If companies want to carry on providing them thereafter, fine; but why should the rest of us subsidise companies through the tax system for providing cars for their employees that are often unnecessary?

In the end, someone will have to consider restricting cars in central London. We shall have to tell people not to bring their cars in during certain hours, unless they have a demonstrable need to do so. Many people do need their cars for good reasons and they should be allowed to use them. People will claim that this is an infringement of their freedom; to a certain extent, it is. Living in society means that some of our freedoms are restricted. We cannot have the right to exercise our freedoms at the expense of maximum discomfort for large numbers of other people and at the expense of their freedoms. If people do not act responsibly, they will have to obey the law.

If we are to implement such an idea, however, we must offer people the only alternative, which is good public transport. If people know that they can get a bus, tube or train, they have no great incentive to take their cars and sit in traffic jams. I do not think that we need coercion. A good public transport policy for London will lead naturally to a decline in the use of the private car. Four people sitting in four cars occupy more space than a double-decker bus, which seems nonsensical. Everything has its price, including road space. It seems wrong that four people should occupy slightly more road space than 80 bus passengers.

Lastly, whatever we do in the House, we must ensure that we provide those who will have to police these various schemes with enough powers to make them work. There is nothing worse than the House passing what seems like good-guy legislation only to see it fall into disrepute through abuse. We need to control traffic in London, to restrict the use of private vehicles and to have more bus lanes. In that case, we must think about more police, more traffic wardens and more people who can penalise anti-social citizens, thereby ensuring that they act in accordance with the wishes of the majority and not in the interests of a selfish minority.

I welcome this excellent Bill. There are certainly sufficient reasons for it to go into Committee. Were there not, it would have been good to see it complete all its stages here this morning, given the great deal of support for it expressed by hon. Members. I am happy to add my support for the Bill to theirs.

12.14 pm

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): It is a pleasure to speak about the Bill this morning, and to be a co-sponsor of it. We owe my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) a great deal for introducing the Bill and giving some of us the chance to be associated with it.

I must apologise for hearing only part of my hon. Friend's speech and for missing a great deal of the debate. Perhaps I should be wearing the stress machine attached to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), but it took one of the coldest days of the year for my central heating boiler to pack up. I then had to try to find workmen to come out and fix it—workmen whose bleepers do not respond to bleeping. It has been a rather stressful experience and I apologise for having to nip off as soon as I finish speaking to make sure that the men can get into the house to fix the boiler.

The debate also gives some of us the opportunity to reflect on related matters. Almost unprecedentedly, officials are crammed into the Box so as to pick up every important sentiment that we want to hand to the Minister.

A city such as Leeds reflects many of the problems and developments with which we are dealing under the Bill. My constituency is a suburban seat which goes into the inner city. We have the problems of the village on the outskirts through which the traffic feeds down from Harrogate. The Harrogate bypass has increased the flow of traffic, and heavy lorries charge through the village streets, whose pavements are only 2 ft wide. There is an old people's home in the village, and elderly people are increasingly worried. Indeed, my mother decided to leave the village, no longer feeling safe as the huge trucks surged through it. People feel that they will be sucked into the road by them. On the village lane, the sides and hedgerows have been smashed by an increasing number of heavy goods vehicles.

In the more suburban areas, the rat runs prevail as the traffic seizes up in the mornings. In the inner-city area, it is esential to improve the quality of the urban environment. Unlike many American cities, British towns and cities have the enormous attraction of pavement life, with shop fronts and people milling about. We have left behind the philosophy of the 1960s, when there was a desire to separate people from traffic and to make them cross streets on bridges and concourses at first-floor level. Perhaps it was just as well that we had a Labour Government then, because the huge recession that ensued meant that all the redevelopment of the period had to stop.

Coming out of the station in Leeds city centre, one sees the walkways on one side crossing to the other side, but since they were built all the Victorian buildings have been preserved, and the high rises, with their horrible plate glass, concrete and concrete walkways, have been discontinued.

Now we are restoring the Victorian splendour of these buildings and trying to pedestrianise the area. In modern American cities like Atlanta—not the older cities such as Boston—there are no people or shops and no life on the pavements. It is a distressing scene.

I see this Bill not as a traffic-calming measure but as an environment-calming measure. I do not know how to calm traffic, short of stopping it altogether. Some traffic-calming schemes do not calm the environment at all. Road humps may be useful, but they do not usually calm the environment. They cause a terrific amount of noise.

It is unfortunate that road humps have sometimes been the only option. Lorries do not pay a great deal of attention to them. In my village of Pool, people asked for road humps. On the Ilkley road in Otley, road humps were wanted because heavy lorries take a short cut through that road, but the lorries hardly notice the humps and the only result is the terrible noise of lorries banging over them.

The significant aspect of the Bill is that local authorities are provided with many alternatives. Before the Bill was introduced, I had already suggested to Leeds highways authority that it should pinch the junction of Ilkley road in Otley, using some of the ideas in a leaflet that I did not know existed until we came to discuss the Bill. Closing one end of a road prevents the entrance of large lorries,

[Dr. Keith Hampson]

although goods vehicles, cars and cycles can enter from the other end of the road. Roads can be narrowed to prevent rat runs.

I do not refute what the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said about policing, but I do not think that many of the Bill's measures would need policing. The attraction of many traffic-calming measures is that, unlike weight restrictions, policemen are not needed to monitor and check them with counters and gauges, which requires the stopping of traffic. Weight restriction measures can be useful, and we have called for them many times on roads into Leeds, but they need to be policed or they become meaningless and are abused. Many of the Bill's measures will solve traffic problems without placing the emphasis on policing.

The Bill's proposals must be considered in conjunction with a broad approach to traffic management. There will not be a great deal of advantage in placing road humps in Pool village if traffic remains at its present volume, because great inconvenience would be caused. There is no point in funnelling traffic into a village close to a bypass which also needs a bypass. In French towns, one always finds a sign to the centre pointing to the left or right, and an ordinary road bypasses the village.

Perhaps the Department of Transport is too regulatory. It seems to be mesmerised by the minutiae of requirements. Is there enough flexibility about the sort of bypasses that can be built and do they have to be so large, with such big verges? Do they need to take up so much land and cost so much?

We have been seeking a bypass for Pool for many years, and had considered a scheme to link into the Otley bypass. Unfortunately, political power changed in the county council and the Labour authority decided that it did not want to spend money in that part of its area; it was diverted to the south of the county and to parts of south and east Leeds. Therefore, we got half a bypass system. One side of Otley is covered but the other side, the Pool side, is not. A bypass was then built in Harrogate, and there is serious traffic congestion in Pool. It seems that there is still no prospect of a bypass that meets ministerial requirements.

Another problem arises from lack of co-ordination between local authorities and the Department. On the side of Otley that has a bypass there is a trunk road, while the other side of the village has a local authority highway. The right hand needs to know what the left hand is doing, so that the Department does not build bypasses where there are trunk roads, while parts of the environment close by are not part of the scheme because they are the responsibility of a local authority. The priority in Leeds is not to build a bypass at Pool or to do anything further in Otley but to spend the money that has been allocated in east and south Leeds.

The Bill's measures should not need detailed requirements, but the Department often insists on them. Many of us tried to improve the quality of life in villages such as Bramhope by the installation of pelican crossings, but a tight formula applies to such crossings: there has to be a specific flow of traffic and a fixed percentage of people who will use the crossing. It is not easy to strike such a balance. Although we all know that it is vital to be able to cross roads with safety, it is not easy to install a pelican crossing, because of a lack of flexibility.

I thank the Department for recognising the scale of the problem in Bramhope; although the precise formula was not being met, it is on the point of being met after 13 years of campaigning, and we have received approval for a pelican crossing. The next step is to have it installed. There is some concern about the time that elapses between approval, planning and implementation. I understand that the crossing is now at the planning stage, but so far no one has been able to say when it will be built.

A bypass is the best way to guarantee the environment of our towns and villages. There must be flexibility and discretion for the local authority, and minimum regulation. When the Bill becomes law, I hope that the Department will encourage local authorities to make full use of their discretion and to look at fairly cheap measures. The Bill would allow them to put in all sorts of temporary measures, which could be a great stimulus to experiment in deciding what will work well.

Neither I nor many of my councillors know about the leaflet that I have mentioned; that shows that there is a case for the Department stimulating local authorities into making greater use of existing schemes—not only from this country but from abroad. We have been lax in the way that we have spread good practice. In many American cities, schemes to improve the quality of the environment are well ahead of those that are provided in this country. It is not just that local authorities are unsure of the law but that many of them are unaware of what can be done. The more that we bring such ideas and schemes to their attention the better, and the more we can encourage them to get cracking and impose them.

This is a non-partisan debate, unlike most of the debates in the run-up to the election. However, it seems that many Liberal Democrat Members, who complain most about local matters, are not present to debate these local issues.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): The hon. Gentleman is squeezing us for time.

Dr. Hampson: Not at all: I was just asking where Liberal Members were for this debate.

I am delighted to see the bipartisan approach to these matters. At the heart of the Bill is a desire to change the balance between pedestrians, inhabitants and traffic. I seek not to ban the motor car, but to strive for a better balance in our villages, suburban areas and inner cities.

The car needs access. People will always find it an attractive way to go from their homes to work, especially on a bitterly cold day, when they can travel in comfort listening to the hi-fi rather than waiting on wet and windy street corners for buses. Therefore, we have to ensure that the environment through which the car goes is not destroyed by it.

This is a small, highly constructive measure, and the debate on it has been constructive. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre will ensure that local authorities make full use of the Bill's provisions, should it become an Act, that they are aware of what will be achievable and will promote good practice. Above all, I hope that funds will be made available to grease the wheels not of the motor car but of the workings of local authorities.

12.29 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I am glad to have the hon. Gentleman's confirmation that, after the next election, he expects to be in his place. We can confirm that he will indeed be in his place—on the Opposition Benches. All the steps being taken by the Labour party, even to the extent of wiring him up to calm him down—something being done to members of his tendency in the Labour party—will not help that party to avoid the public impression, especially in London, of what the Labour party stands for.

Mr. Tony Banks *rose*——

Mr. Bowis: I see that the hon. Gentleman wishes to "uncalm" himself and participate further in the debate.

Mr. Banks: I am calm. I should point out that this has nothing to do with the Labour party. I am wired up because of something in connection with London Weekend Television. I was going to say something nice about the hon. Gentleman, but, in view of what he has said, I doubt whether I shall be able to do so.

Mr. Bowis: I shall have to wait with patience for the day when that becomes possible, perhaps after the next election.

I am pleased to support my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) and I congratulate him on his good fortune in the ballot. I am also pleased to be one of the sponsors of the Bill and I hope to help my hon. Friend speed this measure on to the statute book. Last week, we debated a Bill that would have introduced a national lottery. Unfortunately, not enough of us were here to ensure its further progress, but I was in favour of it because of the assistance that such a scheme would have given to the arts, sport and charitable organisations. Today, we are dealing with a different sort of lottery, but one that I do not support. It is the lottery with people's lives and limbs that is our inner-city and urban traffic. It is mainly an urban problem.

Some of us have met members of a lobby who were here to support a private Member's Bill dealing with disability. I see the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) nodding her head. She may have talked to some of those people in wheelchairs. When I asked these people whether they had always had their disabilities, many said that they had been disabled as a result of road accidents —they were knocked down or had been in a car—and were left with disabilities that would be with them for the rest of their lives. That is the lottery with which we are dealing —a lottery based on the knowledge that speed kills and, when it does not kill, it maims.

I was impressed by the statistics that we were sent by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety which showed that a comparatively small reduction in speed can make a dramatic reduction in injuries. At a speed of 20 mph, a pedestrian hit by a car has comparatively minor injuries, whereas at 30 mph the majority of accidents result in death or serious injuries to those involved. Traffic calming—perhaps we should call it "driver calming"—can help to slow speeds and save lives.

PACTS also showed figures from other European countries. In Denmark 600 schemes have been brought in, resulting in an average 45 per cent. reduction in traffic accidents. In Germany, there has been a 30 to 45 per cent. reduction in casualties because of the introduction of schemes such as those about which we are talking. Where schemes have been introduced in this country, the evidence shows that a substantial and impressive reduction in accidents has resulted. That is why we all support the Bill.

I particularly support the Bill because I represent a south London constituency. As I have often said, the roads in my constituency were designed not for the motor car but for the narrow-gauge horse and cart. With modern traffic flows in volume and speed, there are inevitably accidents on them. All too often, my constituents come down in the morning to get into the cars parked outside their homes and then have to go back to get new wing mirrors or ring up garages to arrange for dents to be knocked out. All too often, parents are concerned to the point of panic if their children run out of the front door, because of the speed with which vehicles travel down narrow roads which, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West said, have become rat runs. We understand that they have come to be used in that way because motorists are trying to avoid traffic jams on main roads. We want to attract traffic away from rat runs and one of the ways of achieving that is to slow traffic so that it is no longer an advantage to use such routes.

After great arguments we have persuaded London Buses Ltd. to introduce the excellent new hoppa bus services, and there are many new routes. Unfortunately, on many occasions we see those buses stationary, because they cannot pass through rat-run routes as a result of an accident or bad parking.

I am sure that we are all aware of the effect of noise and pollution on those who live in narrow streets that are used to avoid traffic jams on main roads. If the Bill's provisions are implemented, they will take away some of the noise during the evening and the night. That will make life in the inner city more attractive for many residents.

A current measure is the implementation of red routes, which I think will do much to draw traffic from the side roads. The evidence obtained from the experiment that took place in north London shows that traffic is drawn on to the main routes. I hope that the management of red routes proves to be as flexible as we would all wish it to be.

There is an impression that a red route means no parking of any sort 24 hours a day. Such a route must be designed to meet the needs of those who occupy certain stretches of it. The restrictions may be enforced at certain times of the day. Along some stretches of the routes, there should be "tidal" systems rather than enforcement on both sides of the road. If that can be done, many of the fears of residents, shopkeepers and traders generally may be put at rest.

A clear message must go out that the schemes will be flexible. The message must also go out that the experiments that have taken place show that traffic flows become better, that buses move more freely, that the public are attracted to using the bus routes and that that helps to increase the trade of the businesses along the routes. After the initial review, it was shown that an impressive number of businesses on an experimental route had increased their business. That is good.

I refer in parenthesis to a specific problem in my constituency, which I know also affects some hon. Members who live in the area, who are perhaps not able to be in their places and to seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Custom car rallies take place on the

[Mr. Bowis]

roads near Battersea park once a month and they are a major nuisance for anyone who lives in the area. There is a great need for some traffic calming or for moving those rallies to a better place—perhaps a disused airfield outside central London could be used. I would welcome that, as would my constituents. The Bill will not give me or my constituents much comfort when it comes to moving custom car rallies from Battersea, but I should be failing in my constituency duty if I did not raise the matter on behalf of my constituents.

Many measures have been taken to calm traffic, to make life easier for local residents and for those who wish to move through a certain area. In the past, there has tended to be an endless succession of changes to one-way systems. Such schemes can work and they make life interesting when I am trying to reach my constituents—I forget that the one-way system has been changed and I have to drive another few miles to reach my constituents. Nevertheless, one-way streets can be beneficial and they are reasonably popular, provided they are accompanied by speed restriction measures.

My experience is that soon after a one-way system has been implemented in a particular street—albeit at the behest of the residents—I receive letters from people in that street complaining about the number of wing mirrors that are damaged. They are also concerned that the one-way system encourages cars to speed because the traffic flows more freely. A one-way system needs to go hand-in-hand with measures to slow the speed of vehicles using those roads.

Another measure often taken is to close off a street. Again, it is an initiative test—almost orienteering—for hon. Members to get to their constituents. Closing off a street certainly resolves the problem of speeding traffic in that street—after all, if there is no traffic there cannot be any speeding vehicles—but the problem simply moves to the next street. The residents of that street then want it to be closed off, and the whole thing becomes absurd. We need to consider the consequential problems for neighbouring streets and simultaneously introduce measures to alleviate them, such as road humps.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West, I am pleased that the Bill will enable the faster introduction of pedestrian crossings. When a child was killed in my constituency, I managed to persuade the authorities that we needed a second pedestrian crossing on that road, albeit within sight of the existing crossing. That took five months. However, I battled for five years to get agreement to a pedestrian crossing over Bolinbroke grove to Wandsworth common. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will ensure that local authorities are made aware of their power to implement pedestrian crosssings more quickly.

More measures are required. The 20 mph schemes on some side roads are effective, provided they are policed. However, it is rather over-egging the pudding to have both a 20 mph limit and road humps on the same road. Both measures are popular, but sleeping policemen have a downside. A patient on a drip in an ambulance, desperate to get to the accident and emergency unit of the local hospital, has an uncomfortable ride. Indeed, some emergency services simply do not like road humps. That apart, many roads should and do qualify for road humps.

Where road humps are not appropriate, there should be more road texturing—a rather sexier term than the technical name. The texturing makes the road rough enough to make it obvious to any driver that he is travelling too fast. That is an excellent scheme in certain areas, as is the road-narrowing scheme. Road narrowing can mean, quite simply, narrowing the road. It can also be done by barriers. They slow the speed of traffic, especially if they are in the middle of the road. After all, drivers do not want to lose their wing mirrors. They can often prevent access by larger vehicles.

I hope that the Bill will persuade authorities to use road narrowing measures at some of London's bridges. In the case of the beautiful Albert bridge, for example, there is a ban on vehicles above a certain weight. Troops of men even have to break step because of the danger of the swinging bridge collapsing. However, too often one sees vehicles that should not use that bridge doing so. Narrowing of the kind used on Hammersmith bridge should be used more to protect other bridges. Also, corner capes can help to prevent the illegal parking at corners that is the cause of many accidents.

Although my hon. Friend's Bill is inevitably in legal, enabling jargon, perhaps this debate will help to flesh out its provisions. I am pleased that it imposes similar requirements to ensure adequate road quality to those placed on public utilities and others in the New Roads and Street Works Bill. Too often, ruts and holes are left when inadequate reparations are made by those who undertake road works.

All the cycling organisations support my hon. Friend's Bill, and I am all in favour of more measures to improve the life of the cyclist in London. However, one must ask cyclists to observe a degree of responsibility for road safety. All too often, excessive speed takes the form of cyclists speeding along pavements or on the road at night without lights.

The police acknowledge that problem, but they are at a loss to know what to do about it because there is no way of identifying an offending cyclist—other than by describing him and his bicycle. If bicycles carried an identifying number that could be seen by a policeman standing on a street corner, the offending rider could be pursued. Most cyclists are not irresponsible, but they can all get a bad name because of the actions of a minority.

There is also the problem of coach drivers who, instead of using coach parks, prefer to pocket the money that they had been given to use them and to park in the street instead. That creates environmental problems for residents, because in the summer coaches are left with their engines running so that the air conditioning will operate. Coaches also obstruct the view of pedestrians and particularly of children, who may run out into the road.

Several hon. Members have already expressed their views about bus lanes. Lorry access is another important aspect of road safety, as is the question of when lorries should be permitted to enter residential streets, if at all. I have doubts about road pricing, particularly in London, although I am not against an experiment. It has the potential for an enormous bureaucratic nightmare—not least because of the many exemptions and exceptions that would have to be made and the difficulty of policing abuse.

Road pricing is also potentially socially unjust, because one would be saying to the less well-off, "You cannot use our roads because you cannot afford to do so, whereas the better-off can."

We should think in terms of a package. No one measure should be viewed in isolation. That is true of red routes, and of this year's vast increase in public transport investment, which is welcome. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members—including those absentees from the Social Democrats, who again seem to have deserted us—support those improvements. Public transport is crucial to what we seek to achieve, but it is not enough on its own. We need measures such as those proposed in the Bill to calm the traffic that remains. Public transport now caters for some 90 per cent. of people who travel to work in the centre of London but for only 15 to 20 per cent. of those who travel to work around the London boroughs where there are not enough bus, train and underground routes. Until such routes exist, we need to calm the traffic.

The Bill is a good and welcome measure which will immediately improve life for people in London and, I am sure, in all urban areas. It will improve their environment, reducing fumes, noise, the volume of traffic and its speed. My hon. Friend the Member for Wyre can be justly proud to have brought the package of measures to the House. I am certainly proud and happy to support him and I wish the Bill a speedy and successful passage through both Houses.

12.50 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): First, I apologise to the House for my late arrival. I have been attending a meeting at Wandsworth town hall along with senior council officer Mr. Dickens and Chief Inspector Muir of the Tooting police. The Minister knows Wandsworth and will be interested to hear that there was standing room only at the meeting of one of the council committees of local residents. The issue under discussion was traffic problems in St. James's drive. The meeting was held at 10.30 am and was attended by 30 or more local residents who had had to take time off work to be there.

Of all the issues that are brought to our attention as Members of Parliament, none figures more regularly in our postbags than the traffic problems encountered by our constituents. I therefore warmly welcome the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans). Its title—the Traffic Calming Bill—says it all. I do not think that any hon. Member, of whatever party, can in any way disagree with the purpose of the Bill, which is to enhance safety and improve the environment. Anything that the Bill can achieve in that regard will be welcomed by us all, whichever area we represent.

Let me make a few observations—constructive, I hope, because I want the Bill to become law—to which the Minister may refer when he sums up. Great confusion exists in our constituents' minds about who is actually responsible for such measures. People often come to us and say, "Look—you're the MP. Surely you can help get this done." People are never sure whether something is the responsibility of the Department of Transport or the local authority, and where the local police come into the matter.

Take, for example, the siting of traffic lights. People say, "If only we could have lights there, it would be an improvement." One is then on a sort of roundabout: who is responsible and who must get approval from whom? It would help if that were clarified.

One reason why I warmly support the Bill and why I left the meeting this morning is that I believe that we should give much greater powers to local authorities—in conjunction with police and local residents—to introduce their own schemes. At this morning's meeting, a repeated complaint was that council officers tell people that they can do something about improvements but that they then go on to say that they have to follow certain procedures.

At the meeting that I attended this morning, I heard that the highways, housing and social services departments had to be consulted. I accept that other departments must be made aware of proposed schemes but, sadly, that takes up a great deal of time. That point was made strongly at this morning's meeting.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) referred to matters that affect his constituency, which adjoins mine. I am sure that he has often heard similar comments. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that there are ways to grant local authorities, after having consulted local groups and the police, the power to introduce local schemes that would benefit local residents and improve the movement of traffic in general.

The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) referred to road humps, the cost of which always amazes me. I am not thinking about the surveys; I refer to the cost of constructing road humps. I have never been able to find out why they are so expensive. The greatest problem is the enormous speed at which vehicles travel. Road humps do not always deter fast drivers. We must try even harder to control the speed at which vehicles are driven through the residential areas of our big cities and towns.

Another problem we encounter relates to the type of vehicles that are allowed to be driven through residential areas. I hold in my hand a photograph of a residential area in my constituency. It shows juggernaut lorries delivering goods to a small factory that was sited in this area years ago, long before such huge lorries ever came on to our roads. I am deeply involved with Wandsworth council on this issue. Council officials say that they fully understand the annoyance of local residents. These huge lorries travel through streets where cars are already parked, and that presents an additional problem.

There is also the problem of the time of day when these juggernaut lorries collect materials from or deliver materials to this paper factory. I hope that the Minister will be able to say whether powers can be granted to the local authority to restrict the size of the lorries that are allowed to travel through residential areas to collect or deliver goods to companies and, specifically, the time at which they are allowed to collect or deliver those goods.

Huge lorries are delivering or collecting material from this company in the Duntshill road area 24 hours a day. The matter has been taken up by local residents. They have asked why 24-hour-a-day delivery is allowed, and have been told that that is most convenient for the drivers, since it allows them to deliver very late at night or very early in the morning. It would be most helpful if the local authority were given the power to restrict the size and type of vehicle and the times at which vehicles are allowed to call at or leave this firm's premises. I hope that the Minister will consider that matter.

Another problem that we must consider—I hope that the Bill will give us an opportunity to do so—is the growth of traffic and the parking that results. A point made forcefully at the meeting I attended, to which all of us who represent city constituencies can relate, concerned the problem caused by train services operated either by British Rail or London Underground. Early in the morning,

[Mr. Tom Cox]

enormous numbers of people park their cars in streets adjoining the stations, causing problems to the residents. We must devise a system, in co-operation with local authorities, to try to stop that practice.

The British Rail Wandworth Common station has adequate car parking facilities. Sadly, the problem is that many of the people who use that station are not prepared to use the facilities provided by British Rail—they are not prepared to pay. Instead, they park in the adjoining roads, to the great annoyance of local residents.

Another problem that has taken off is that of double parking. It does not occur only during the day times. I accept that firms may double-park to deliver goods, and men working in a house may put a note in the window of their van to say that they will be at such and such an address if the van needs moving. However, double parking now takes place throughout the night and causes enormous problems.

I have spoken to local police officers about the problem, and they tell me that they are opposed to the practice, but they ask where they can tell those motorists to park. Rightly, the police say that they must improve their image with the public. There was an onslaught against double parrking in my area four months ago, when the police placed stickers on cars that were double-parked. That did not help to improve their image. We must consider the problem of parking, because increased traffic is, sadly, not matched by increased parking spaces.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) spoke about the importance of public transport. We all differ in this House on many issues, but I hope that whatever party we belong to we can come to appreciate the importance of public transport. Undoubtedly, it has the support of the public.

Two years ago, many parts of London, including the constituencies of the hon. Member for Battersea and myself, were subject to the western environmental improvement route—the Department of Transport proposals. A series of meetings were held on that route, and the hon. Member for Battersea and I attended many of them. It was standing room only at those meetings, because hundreds of people were so concerned at the threat to their homes and about whether they might be demolished. The stated purpose of the Bill is to improve road safety and environmental protection—issues which figured high on the agenda at those meetings. What came out of them was a need to improve London transport.

The Northern line, which runs through my constituency, is often called the misery line. People often have to travel in worse conditions than those in which cattle would be transported. I am sure that, if cattle were transported in the way that many of my constituents have to travel to and from work on the Northern line, early-day motions would be tabled which would win enormous support. We must improve condition and quality for travellers on London Transport and on public transport in general, if we are to encourage people to leave their cars at home.

Tooting Bec station is another example—I am sure that the constituents of the hon. Member for Battersea suffer from that as much as mine do. The escalators there have not worked for months and we cannot find out when they will work, not merely for a few days but continuously. That deters many people who, because they cannot walk down or up the stairs, will not use the station.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West said, those are important issues if we are to develop the purpose behind the Bill, as I believe we should. My hon. Friend also mentioned bus lanes. Like him, I support them and never drive down them, no matter how irritated I might become with motorists who disregard them. However, there are not enough bus lanes, and they stop and start. Millbank is a classic example—there are bus lanes outside this place, but they disappear completely after Vauxhall bridge. We must develop a better, more integrated system for bus lanes, as there is no doubt that they keep the traffic moving.

My criticism on bus lanes concerns the total inadequacy of signs to show that one exists. Schedule 2 to the Bill states that it will

"impose requirements as to . . . the placing of signs".

I hope that that will include signs for bus lanes, which are often neither clear enough nor big enough. Again, there is an example in Millbank, outside the House. People may say—with some truth—that they were unaware that they were in a bus lane. That is no excuse, but if signs were larger and were clearly displayed, no one would be able to use that excuse when stopped by the police. Sadly, I do not see the police stopping enough motorists who disregard bus lanes.

If those issues can be incorporated in the Bill in Committee, the House will warmly support it. I thank the hon. Member for Wyre for the opportunity that he has given me to mention some issues which are important to my constituents. The other matters relating to London Transport and bus lanes are of importance to many hon. Members and to the society in which we live. They are of importance if we are to keep London moving. More and more hon. Members—whether or not they represent London—know that it is, sadly, grinding to a halt. If the Bill can do anything to avoid that, it is to be applauded, and I congratulate the hon. Member on introducing it.

1.8 pm

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): On behalf of the Opposition, I warmly welcome the Bill and congratulate the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on succeeding in the ballot and on introducing a valuable measure.

As the hon. Member said, the Bill has the support of many organisations, not least the Royal Automobile Club, the Automobile Association, Friends of the Earth, cycling organisations, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety and many local authorities. I understand that the Minister will support the Bill, and therefore we hope that it will have a speedy passage through the House and the other place.

I am conscious that reservations have been expressed, especially about the regulatory framework of the Bill, by the Association of London Authorities and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, but I accept the assurances of the hon. Member for Wyre that the regulations will be drawn up in such a way as to give local authorities maximum flexibility in designing and implementing the various traffic-calming measures with a minimum of bureaucratic procedures. I trust that the Minister will echo those sentiments when he responds.

I also appreciate the safeguards with regard to the emergency services. In Committee, some attention should be paid to buses, because London Transport repeatedly expresses concern about the difficulties that some buses have with road humps. I hope that the Department has learnt its lesson from the fiasco of the road humps regulations to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) referred.

The hon. Member for Wyre has already explained why the Bill is necessary. I welcome the appearance of the concept and the term "traffic-calming" in legislation. Not so long ago, traffic-calming was consigned to the outer fringes of the transport planning orthodoxy, and the speed of its promotion to a central plank of traffic management has been remarkable. That may reflect the need for new thinking that has been forced on us all, brought about by the rapidly worsening traffic conditions in our cities, towns and villages, to which many hon. Members have referred.

The demands of residents in my constituency for traffic-calming measures have increased dramatically in recent years. The chief engineer of Lewisham council, John Couch, is a great enthusiast for traffic-calming measures, and he and his authority seek to meet residents' demands. However, as I said in an intervention, local authorities are experiencing a major difficulty in gaining support from the Department of Transport for many of the environmentally based traffic-calming schemes that they wish to implement.

Such has been the mismatch of funds available to Lewisham council that one of our most critically needed schemes has had to be put into the city challenge programme. I draw to the Minister's attention as he is present this morning the fact that that scheme is in Deptford Church street, where, tragically, there have just been two fatalities and where the local residents of the Crossfield estate have, quite properly, made many demands for traffic calming on that dangerous dual carriageway and for a light-operated pedestrian crossing in that area. I trust that funds will be forthcoming for that measure, as I hope that they will be increased in line with the needs and opportunities presented by the Bill.

It may have been the Government's predictions that road traffic would double within the next so many years that sent shock waves through the transport establishment, as planners calculated the environmental, social and economic cost of catering for that increase. Those calculations galvanised many into looking anew at transport policy. Ideas of traffic restraint and management have gained greater credibility, even within the Government, but, sadly, Britain continues to trail miserably behind its continental European neighbours, which are many years ahead in traffic management and environmental awareness.

As the hon. Member for Wyre said, traffic calming is to improve the immediate environment and create what Dr. Hass-Klau, one of the foremost authorities on traffic calming, calls "peaceful co-existence" between all road users.

At its most rudimentary, traffic calming is concerned with slowing vehicles down and reducing casualties. As so many hon. Members have said, speed is a killer. Recent reports show that a pedestrian hit by a car travelling at 40 mph has an 80 per cent. chance of being killed, but a similar accident at 20 mph produces only a 5 to 10 per cent. risk of death.

Road casualties are still unacceptably high, particularly in London, which the insurance service said recently has the most dangerous roads in Britain. Children, cyclists and pedestrians are particularly vulnerable road users. Britain still has one of the highest pedestrian death rates in Europe, and the child pedestrian fatality rate is 31 per cent. higher than the EC average.

About 44,000 children were killed or injured on Britain's roads in 1990 and, unlike adult casualties, the trend is upwards. One of the saddest and clearest effects of the dangers on our roads is that parents no longer feel that they can allow their children to walk to school. In 1971, 80 per cent. of seven and eight-year-olds walked to school on their own; today, that figure is less than 10 per cent. Although many fewer children are making that journey, the casualty rate is still rising. Clearly, much more needs to be done. Experience in other countries, most notably Germany and Denmark, shows that reductions in accidents of between 15 and 40 per cent. can be achieved with area-wide traffic-calming schemes.

The introduction of the 15 experimental 20 mph zones is a welcome initiative, and there is clearly great scope for bringing in widespread 20 mph zones in residential districts. The Minister recently congratulated drivers on the drop in road casualty figures, but I urge him not to be complacent. He will know that, in a recent study, of child pedestrian casualties, almost half the drivers were exceeding the 30 mph speed limit. Lower speed limit zones should not be confined to single streets or residential areas.

A recent study by Dr. Hass-Klau showed that 88 per cent. of the current 385 planned or implemented schemes in this country deal only with a single street or a few streets. We believe that we should look at shopping streets, trunk roads and whole districts to discover ways of making our towns and communities safer and more pleasant places to live.

Traffic calming consists of more than reducing speed limits on residential roads. The Labour party believes that it should be part of a package of measures implemented across whole districts, and even towns and cities, with the aim of radically improving the environment, reducing pollution and giving positive encouragement to other modes of travel, such as walking and cycling. The package must include improved public transport, as my hon. Friends have noted so eloquently——

Mr. Bowis: And Conservatives.

Ms. Ruddock: Yes, they were echoed by Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) should study the Labour party's traffic policies, as they are clearly in line with his thinking.

We believe that the package must include the improvement of public transport and the provision of pedestrian areas, cycle paths and bus priority measures. Part of that package must be tough parking rules, and the acknowledgment that some form of car restraint is now becoming necessary if we are to improve our communities. We must view traffic calming as a philosophy, not just a traffic management tool.

I pay tribute to the many schemes already implemented or planned throughout the country. Labour authorities such as Sheffield, York and Barnsley are introducing imaginative traffic calming schemes. Sheffield has introduced 20 mph limits in housing estates and is experimenting with road humps, chicanes and other features to try to persuade drivers to reduce their speed. York has created pedestrian priority zones and bus-only

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routes and has implemented a range of traffic-calming measures. The level of public support for such schemes is particularly encouraging. A recent study has shown that the majority of businesses and even car drivers supported the schemes, and 95 per cent. were considered a success by the local authorities that introduced them.

In contrast to those local authority initiatives, the Government's major experiment has been in traffic management, in the form of London's red routes, which seem to have been enthusiastically received by Conservative Members. I wonder whether they have read the details of the results of the pilot scheme. Ministers have called them a total success and even suggested that the scheme is particularly beneficial for non-car users.

I only wish that it were so, but it seems to me to be so far from the truth that Ministers must be so desperate to claim at least one success in transport policy that they have failed to see the objective analysis of their own Department. As we all know, the success of any new measure, and particularly of private Members' legislation, depends on the extent of Government support. I would be the first to welcome the Government's conversion to traffic calming, but evidence on the ground of their good intentions is hard to find and often contradictory.

The original red route 'scheme was ostensibly an area-wide package of measures involving parking enforcement on the main roads, entry treatment at junctions and traffic-calming measures on the side roads. In January last year, the red lines were painted and the new parking regime put into place as part of the plan to tackle traffic congestion. The effect of these measures has indeed been to speed up traffic, and many of the drivers who are thus speeded up are breaking the speed limit.

An even more significant change has been an 11 per cent. increase in the traffic using these roads, thus creating a new and urgent demand for traffic-calming by people in the areas affected. Along sections of the route, from Angel to Archway, for example, 80 per cent. of the road has no bus lane; there is no cycle lane, and one third of the traffic signals have no pedestrian phase.

As I have said, traffic is now travelling faster. An inspector on the 43 bus route, however, found that bus journey times were back to pre-red route times, so any improvement for buses is short term and is already being cancelled out by the increase in traffic.

Moreover, along parts of the red route, the promised traffic-calming measures are still not in place, despite repeated efforts by the local authority to obtain departmental approval and money. If the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) were still in his place, I would tell him that the local authority in question, Islington, is Labour-controlled. It is an enthusiast for traffic-calming, but it has not found the Government as supportive as he might suggest.

The Government have failed to give the same priority to measures that would improve the local environment and facilitate pedestrian convenience and safety. Just two days ago, the Secretary of State announced his intention to extend the red route network throughout London. What will be the consequence of an 11 per cent. increase in traffic across the 300 miles of the network; and what would the Minister expect if the recession had ended and the 11 per cent. decrease in the number of HGVs on these routes had been reversed?

The measures in the red route scheme fundamentally undermine the potential for this Bill. I ask the Minister to comment on the fact that we are advised that there are no plans for Government-funded traffic-calming schemes to be introduced as an integral part of the 300-mile red route network.

Red routes without traffic calming will become nothing but urban motorways, on which traffic can speed through neighbourhoods, with all the attendant problems. For London, at least, the excellent initiative of the hon. Member for Wyre will be a lost cause.

I end by making it very clear that, when Labour comes to power very soon, we will positively encourage traffic calming. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) invited me to outline the Labour party's policy. You might caution me for doing so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is relevant.

We will tackle the problem of increasing congestion resulting from the over use of the private car. We will substitute public transport for private transport. We will create more bus priority lanes. We shall see that we have better enforcement. We will achieve the integration of public transport and offer people high-quality alternatives to the use of private cars. Red routes under Labour will become green routes, and London will be a better city in which to live and work.

In relation to the Bill, we will change the terms and criteria of the transport supplementary grant, which are not appropriate to local authorities' priorities. We wish to redress the current imbalance, which places too much emphasis on large-scale road projects and the needs of through traffic and too little emphasis on environmental objectives.

I welcome the money that has been earmarked for safety schemes, although it falls far short of the amount required. It is right to broaden the conditions from casualty reduction alone, to include measures aimed at improving the overall environment. We intend to merge transport supplementary grant and section 56 grant and to establish new criteria for the allocation of funds. The new criteria will correct the imbalance and will include not just time savings and safety, but environmental improvements, and they will cover all roads.

The measures that we shall take in government will complement those in the Bill. I was successful in piloting a private Member's Bill through the House, and I know how exciting and interesting that can be. However, it also involves much hard work. The hon. Member for Wyre has begun the process. He has our co-operation and enthusiasm on this important traffic-calming measure. I wish him success and guarantee him our support.

1.25 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) on his success in the ballot and on his important Bill. He made a distinguished contribution to the debate and has given the House an opportunity to debate not only traffic calming but the whole issue of road safety on which the Government have a proud record.

We have had speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Mr. Amess), for Harbourgh (Sir J.

Farr), for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden), for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson), for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes), for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) and for Battersea (Mr. Bowis). There were also constructive speeches by the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Members for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox). As hon. Members have said, there have been no contributions from the Liberal Democrat party, which often purports to be on the side of residents and pedestrians.

The Government attach considerable importance to the use of traffic-calming techniques which can be invaluable in enhancing the safety and appearance of a locality. They form an integral part of most area-wide local safety schemes, which can particularly benefit the most vulnerable road users. The Department of Transport has consistently sought to promote the value of traffic calming. Five years ago, the Department published an influential leaflet on the topic to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West referred. The leaflet drew attention to some of the measures that had then been implemented in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe. These can help to reduce traffic speeds, make streets safer and more pleasant to live in and discourage through traffic from using inappropriate local roads.

The response to our publication was considerable. It has helped to demonstrate the interest in the use of self-enforcing traffic engineering measures to improve safety and environmental conditions. The Department has subsequently put considerable effort into providing local authorities with technical guidance, through the traffic advisory unit.

In recent years, the legal position has become slightly confused and that is why the Bill is especially welcome. I am pleased to say that the Government have helped with the drafting of the Bill and are as keen as anybody to see it reach the statute book quickly. The Highways Act 1980 contains specific powers for the construction of road humps, an addition which was made under schedule 10 to the Transport Act 1981. We are aware that some local authorities doubt whether the general existing powers are adequate for them to undertake traffic-calming measures for which no specific powers are currently available.

It is not at all clear that the general powers to constuct features in the road, notably sections 62(2) and 77 of the Highways Act, extend to features such as chicanes and road narrowing. There are divergent opinions on the matter. Many measures, such as those in the leaflet to which I referred, have been used in the United Kingdom and more widely in other parts of Europe and appear to operate safely and effectively in constraining vehicle speed to an appropriate level. It would be most unfortunate if there were no specific legal authority to authorise those measures.

When we published our reports for improved pedestrian safety in April 1989, we gave a commitment that the Government would clarify the law in respect of speed-reducing measures to allow the use of horizontal and vertical deflection in addition to road humps. That was intended to back up existing controls on traffic speed and movements and to make enforcement easier. Unfortunately, no appropriate legislative opportunity in Government time has so far emerged, and that is why I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre, who used his second place in the ballot to introduce the Bill.

Traffic calming offers a cost-effective way to encourage people to drive at a speed and in a manner appropriate to the roads that they are using. The precise measures to be used in any situation have to be decided at local level. This is a matter for the individual highway authorities, in consultation with the police and others. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon spoke about the need for consultation on such measures. Although there is always frustration at the time that it takes to introduce new traffic-calming schemes, it is important that there should be consultation.

The major contribution that the Government and the Department of Transport can make is to ensure that the local authorities have the appropriate tools for the task. We have a continuing involvement in developing new traffic engineering approaches and we have taken a number of initiatives. Our urban safety demonstration project, which was set up to establish the extent to which accidents to all road users could be reduced, has been widely welcomed.

In 1990, there were 5,217 fatal accidents on our roads, out of a total of more than 340,000 casualties. Some 69 per cent. of casualties occurred on built-up roads with a speed limit of 40 mph or less. Nearly half the casualties on built-up roads were vulnerable road users—25 per cent. were pedestrians, 10 per cent. were cyclists and 13 per cent. were motor cyclists. Over 95 per cent. of all pedestrian accidents occurred in built-up areas, as did 90 per cent. of cycle casualties and 77 per cent. of motor cycle casualties. The emphasis must therefore be on improving road safety in urban areas if we are to make further progress towards our target of reducing road casualties by one third by the year 2000.

We selected five towns to take part in the urban safety demonstration project—Bristol, Reading, Sheffield, Bradford and Nelson. They were chosen because they were places with an average accident risk and had a range of road network types with interaction betweeen main road and residential road traffic. The towns were large enough to assess that the target reduction could not be reached by chance. About £250,000 was spent in each scheme area. The schemes were intended to pay for themselves, through accident reduction, in under three years. A variety of measures were used to improve conditions for the more vulnerable user and to divert traffic from residential areas on to more suitable through routes. These included road humps, mini-roundabouts, banned right turns, full road closures, limiting the use of some roads to certain classes of vehicle such as buses, pinch points, central refuges and sheltered parking.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Recently, there has been considerable concern among groups representing elderly and disabled people about the statistics of accidents among the more vulnerable. Has that been reflected in reports generally? What will the Minister do about this, given that those groups claim that accidents involving such people are increasing?

Mr. Chope: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not able to participate in the debate. If he had, he would have heard about several schemes to improve road safety not just for all pedestrians but particularly for the elderly. Traffic calming is of great help to the elderly pedestrian. The Government are committed to improving the road safety of all road users and we are targeting the most

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vulnerable groups. That is why we have been targeting children and will increasingly be targeting elderly road users. I am pleased that, this year, the Prince Michael of Kent road safety awards are being given for initiatives directed towards further improving the safety of the elderly road user.

I revert to the urban safety demonstration project. The changes in the accident numbers were judged against the figures in areas of comparable size and character and the results showed an overall reduction in accidents of about 13 per cent. Accident numbers were reduced on arterial routes and in residential areas. There was a reduction in accidents involving all road users, especially cyclists and motor cyclists, who do not normally benefit from traditional black spot treatment.

Measures were taken to redistribute traffic and they were effective in all five towns. After some initial difficulties, schemes were accepted by residents, who understood the benefits of improved safety when offset against some loss of direct access. The strategy used was successful. Although individual measures need to be adjusted to meet local conditions, it is clear that if such measures were adopted in all urban areas, it would potentially reduce the national accident figure by about 5 per cent. That would prevent about 15,000 accidents a year. Although it is impossible to put this properly in money terms, the saving would be about £300 million at current prices. That shows that investment in traffic calming produces a good return for the taxpayer. That is why the Government are investing so much in road safety and road engineering measures.

The introduction of 20 mph zones was a Government initiative. I think that it has the potential to be extremely successful. There is already considerable demand to establish those zones. Until recently, it was thought that it would not be practicable to introduce them because the police would have to enforce the reduced speed limit, and we know that it is difficult for the police to undertake extra enforcement where there is not much current compliance. It became clear that, if there were road engineering measures to complement the speed limit, the speed zones would effectively be self-enforcing. That is the essence of a 20 mph zone, and that is why such zones are becoming increasingly popular. We introduced them at the beginning of last year, and about a dozen were started. Two new ones have started this month and applications are coming in fast. The zones offer tremendous potential, especially in urban areas. I estimate that eight out of every 10 urban roads would potentially be eligible to be part of a 20 mph zone.

Mr. Tony Banks: Does the Minister accept that if 20 mph zones are introduced, there will have to be many new signs? The local authority in Newham, North-West complains about the cost of such schemes, which becomes prohibitive because of all the new signs that have to be erected. What can be done about that?

Mr. Chope: It is important that there should be a clear sign to show that one is entering a different speed zone where, of course, a different speed limit applies. We realise that there are associated costs. That is why, as part of the transport supplementary grant allocations this year and next year and for the first time, we have said that local authorities will be able to qualify for capital sums specifically for local safety schemes. That is an important initiative and it has been widely welcomed. The money going into it next year will be 38 per cent. higher than that provided for it this year. There is plenty of scope for imaginative local authorities that wish to take advantage of the new opportunities that are available to them.

I am conscious of the fact that many hon. Members are waiting to participate in the next debate. I am sure that they will recognise, however, that we have been engaged in an important debate. I could say much more, but before I conclude to allow the House to move on the next business, I shall refer briefly to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), who I think has been embarrassed by the success of the red route pilot scheme. That being so, she seeks at every opportunity to misrepresent the benefits that have come from it. It is amazing that in a debate devoted to road safety she commented adversely on the red route scheme, without mentioning that there had been a more than 30 per cent. reduction in the number of accidents during the pilot scheme. That is far greater than the reduction elsewhere in London over the same period.

It is also important to remember that there has been an increase in the speed at which buses have been able to travel. The hon. Member for Deptford sought to challenge that with some anecdotal evidence from one bus inspector on route 43. That is not a satisfactory response to the research by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory, on behalf of the Department of Transport. It has international repute for being objective in assessing such schemes, which is why it was chosen.

The red route pilot has been a success and the people of London will benefit from the extension of the system. Although traffic on the red routes will be more consistent and flow faster, it will also be diverted away from less suitable residential roads. The hon. Lady asked the rhetorical question: what would happen if all red routes took an additional 11 per cent. of traffic? The answer is that life on other roads, especially in residential areas, would be much more tolerable for the people of London. We must remember that only about 14 per cent. of those who commute to the centre of London do so by car; the remainder use public transport. The Government are committed to improving the quality of public transport.

Ms. Ruddock: I am not disappointed by the success of the red routes. I have read all the material and studied all the evidence that the Minister says comes from excellent sources. However, the Government's propaganda—their press releases—on that excellent study highlights only chosen points and does not give a full picture of the research.

I repeat that traffic and traffic speeds have increased. Ultimately, if a road carries more and more traffic, that traffic will slow down. Meanwhile, the traffic is speeding and that has created a problem. The pedestrian casualty rate may well have dropped, but the Minister knows that the safest roads for pedestrians are the motorways. People are deterred from crossing roads because there are no places at which they can safely cross. They are being driven off the roads, many of which are local high streets.

When the red routes are extended throughout London, there will be chaos, confusion and real problems in many neighbourhoods—many of which are represented by Conservative Members.

Mr. Chope: It was a mistake to give way to the hon. Lady, as she tried to make another speech. She has shown how muddled is the Opposition's policy on investment in our road infrastructure, both national and local. She said that motorways were the safest roads, and we know that dual-carriageway trunk roads are the second safest. We need to invest more, both in national and local roads, to improve road safety even further. However, the hon. Lady has admitted that the Opposition's policy is to reduce investment in roads, which would mean, for example, fewer bypasses. In contrast, the Government have provided about 100 new bypasses during the past 10 years, and there are about 170 other towns and villages waiting for one. The hon. Lady said that were there ever to be a Labour Government, she would halt the bypass programme.

Ms. Ruddock: I know that hon. Members want to move on to the next debate, but I must put on record the fact that I did not say that we would halt the bypass programme.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Lady said that she would transfer elsewhere the money allocated in the transport supplementary grant for bypasses. That is clearly on the record.

This has been a good-humoured debate. I hope that the logic of the position is accepted on both sides of the House. We cannot continue to improve road safety unless we continue to invest heavily in our road system. That is why I am proud to be a member of a Government who are committed to further investment in our national roads infrastructure, rather than being committed to reducing it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Freedom of Information Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.44 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am pleased that the Traffic Calming Bill received a Second Reading, because it is a useful measure. If I had allowed my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) to speak on traffic planning measures, he would have done so without hesitation, deviation, or repetition for longer than was available to debate the Bill. However, I will make possible a tripartite welcome to the Bill of the hon. Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) by wishing it every success in Committee.

I am grateful for the 45 minutes that are available to debate my Freedom of Information Bill, and hope that all hon. Members who want to contribute will be able to do so. I can be brief, because the Bill has already passed through many hands. I am the latest fortunate recipient. I successfully introduced two earlier private Member's Bills dealing with different aspects of freedom of information, but the measure now before the House is the most important of the three, because it will provide umbrella legislation within which the two other Acts would operate.

The Bill essentially concerns official secrecy and proposes a new statutory right of access to official records. It will allow ordinary citizens access to records held by the Government and other public authorities. Information could be withheld only if it could be established that its disclosure would result in genuine harm.

The case for such legislation has been frequently stated. The Bill seeks to empower the individual and that principle is one on which the whole House ought to agree. I am happy that my Bill has all-party support and widespread public support.

If my Bill reaches the statute book, it will ensure that people will not continue to be left in ignorance about important developments concerning their personal affairs, communities, environment, safety and public authority services. It will allow the public to protect their own interests in dealing with the state. There has been a drift towards centralisation in Governments of both political complexions in recent years and a measure to redress that balance is now required.

The Bill would enable individuals to know the basis on which decisions were taken on their behalf and to challenge those that they considered unsound. They would also be able to ensure that agencies that purport to protect the public are doing their job properly, rather than be fobbed off with assurances that they are unable to question. Individuals could also challenge the official complacency that one sometimes confronts when attempting to obtain information in order to effect change.

Openness would be a safeguard against the potential arbitrary exercise of power. I hope that that important principle commends itself to right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. The Bill would invigorate and enhance the machinery of government and our political system. It would allow better scrutiny of official decisions and make it more difficult for mistakes to be concealed. I found refreshing the creditable performance of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when he openly admitted before the House the mistake that he made last weekend. We all make mistakes and we should be less

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concerned about trying to conceal them. The Bill would also make it difficult for unworkable policies to be imposed.

I could give numerous examples to illustrate my arguments, but will cite just three that recently came to my attention. Why should the reports compiled by the vehicle certification agency on the safety and pollution standards of new models of cars be kept secret? I am not suggesting for a moment that the agency approves unsafe cars, because I know that it does not. I am pleased that it undertakes the work that it does. The public are entitled to know which of the approved cars are the safest or the least polluting, but at the moment, they do not have access to the information.

Secondly, why cannot we find out more about safety problems affecting medicines? I discovered recently that the medicines control agency of the Department of Health inspects pharmaceutical plants, but the disclosure of the results of such inspections would contravene section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968. We learnt from the press last week that there had been serious safety problems at a Fisons pharmaceutical plant in Cheshire, but that information did not come from any British source. It was released in the United States under the American Freedom of Information Act.

Thirdly, why is the information about the quality of drinking water and hygiene conditions on British cruise liners secret? It is true that a prestigious ship such as the QE2, which plies across the Atlantic, is subject to inspection by the British Ports Authority when it docks in British ports, but the reports are kept secret. When the ship goes to New York, however, the American authorities can, under the Freedom of Information Act, expose any items of concern to them and make them public. The American Centre for Disease Control quite properly goes out of its way to circulate the inspection score results for each ship to travel agents and the press to ensure that the public know about any potential problems.

Unfortunately, the American way is not the British way. Let us contrast the American provisions with our own. I choose as an example—it is only one of many—the case of a hostel for the homeless in London which last year was closed down with only two weeks' notice because it was alleged that the drains were in imminent danger of becoming a health and safety hazard. The Government's position was that repairs would be too expensive. When the Minister for Housing and Planning was asked on a BBC radio programme why no one had been allowed to see the report that described the nature of the health hazard and the reason why it was estimated that repairs would cost as much as £2 million, he replied

"You cannot have detailed reports made available to every outside organisation and everybody who wants to come along and look at them . . . There is no way that I am interested in having umpteen organisations looking into every last detail of all our papers . . . I will not show you the report. I see no reason to show the BBC the report. You know the contents of the report. If you don't believe me that is tough luck."

In that example, the Government were essentially saying that there is no way that their decisions will be subject to scrutiny. That is precisely what is wrong with the present system. That is what the Bill seeks to change.

There is much support for the Bill. As I said earlier, it has cross-party support and I am grateful to those hon. Members who have sponsored it. Moreover, there is a clear body of public support for the measure, which has been tested by opinion polling. The latest MORI poll, conducted last January, found that 77 per cent. of the public back a freedom of information Act. The Minister may be interested to know, in parenthesis, that 75 per cent. of Conservative voters also wanted such legislation. He might tuck that information in his inside pocket and take it to the chairman of the Conservative party for use in coming weeks.

The House will know that other Freedom of Information Bills have been before the House. As long ago as in July 1979, there was a Bill which, if anything, had more distinguished support than mine. Its sponsors included no less a person than the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who happens to hold the distinguished position of Home Secretary in the present Government. That may explain his absence. Freedom of information is not an issue which appeals merely to special interest groups, to the Liberal Democrats or to other Opposition parties. To his credit, the present Home Secretary supported the Bill at a time when his own party was in government. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that and take a similarly enlightened view of the Bill.

Another distinguished supporter of our cause is the right hon. and learned Member for Tunbridge Wells (Sir P. Mayhew)—who is only, after all, the Attorney-General. In 1979, the right hon. and learned Gentleman served on the Standing Committee that considered the Bill. On 15 February 1979 he said:

"I hope very much that a public right of access to official information will prove practicable and that we can so order our affairs that a member of the public who is affected by an official decision can, as of right, get at the information upon which that decision is based. If it proves practicable, I believe that such a right should be enshrined in statute."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee C*, 15 February 1979; c. 207.]

If that was the view then of the present Attorney-General, he, too, should be here today to give legal advice to the Minister.

At that time people were concerned about the practicability of introducing a wide-ranging freedom of information measure, even though similar measures had long been in force in the United States and Sweden. Since then, however, we have dealt with the issue of practicability. Legislation similar to this measure has been introduced in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, all with Westminster-style Governments. If similar legislation has been found to be practicable and compatible with the Westminster model of government in other countries, I do not see why it should not be good enough for us.

The list of Cabinet Ministers does not end there. The right hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Mr. Rifkind), who is now the Secretary of State for Transport, supported the Bill, as did the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was a member of the all-party parliamentary committee for freedom of information. That committee was dedicated to securing precisely this kind of legislation. At that time the Chancellor of the Exchequer was the committee's vice-chairman. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind when he replies to the debate.

The Minister ought also to bear in mind that in 1981 the Minister of State for the Armed Forces wrote a very interesting article. I anticipate that the Government's reply will be that this would cost too much money. However, the

right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), who is now the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, said in that interesting article in 1981:

"Critics of freedom of information say that the costs of implementing the legislation would be prohibitive. I would answer that, on the contrary, it is secret government that is expensive."

The right hon. Gentleman went on to refer to

"the squandering of taxpayers' money"

in some then recent scandals that had been concealed by official secrecy. He added:

"Freedom of information would give the British people less government, better government and more democratic government."

In the past, Government Ministers have supported such a measure. I hope that they will not be found wanting when this measure is put to the test.

Right of access is properly subject to a series of carefully honed and well-worked exemptions. Information would not have to be disclosed if, to do so, would damage defence, security interests, international relations, law enforcement, the competitive position of businesses, third parties or personal privacy. I stress that necessary confidentiality would be protected. I do not want anybody to think that this is a snoopers' charter.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): One of my constituents has been trying for about five years to obtain a hearing for his case against the national health service. He has been thwarted because he has been denied access to information regarding his health history. Would the Bill benefit my constituent?

Mr. Kirkwood: A private Member's Bill, which became the Access to Health Records Act 1990, gives people access, as of right, to their health records. It was introduced by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). That Bill was also the result of pressure by the Campaign for Freedom of Information. Alas, the provisions of that Act are not retrospective. If the health records to which the hon. Gentleman refers were written prior to the implementation of the Act, he may be unable to obtain help from it. This Bill, however, would, as a matter of overarching principle, allow that to happen.

Policy advice given by officials ought also to be properly protected. That does not mean that the factual information upon which it is based—analyses, projections and any other factual data—would be protected. Policy advice, however, certainly should be protected. In exceptional cases, but only where there had been an abuse of authority, official negligence or a danger to the public, exempt information still might be disclosable. Even in those circumstances there would be no automatic right of access; the benefits of disclosure would have to outweigh the possible damage caused. It would have to be shown that, in those circumstances, releasing the information was in the public interest.

In common with the data protection provisions that cover electronically stored information, the Bill would be enforced by an independent commissioner. A tribunal or registrar and tribunal would back up the commissioner.

I expect that the Government may say that the citizens charter provides the answer to the problems of secrecy and that the Bill is unnecessary. I welcome the charter and I agree that it contains some minor disclosure proposals, but it does not do very much. The important difference is that, under the citizens charter, the Government decide what information should be disclosed, not the individual seeking it. The £5 million used in publicity to launch the citizens charter could pay for one year's worth of public provision of access under a freedom of information Act. It cost the Australians £4·7 million in 1990-91 to deal with 24,000 requests for information.

The Bill would give our citizens a fundamental democratic right—the right to know. Other countries provided that right years ago. Sweden has already provided the necessary legislation, America introduced such legislation in 1966 and France introduced it in 1978. Australia, Canada and New Zealand produced freedom of information laws in 1982. It is time that Britain followed suit.

2.1 pm

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): I hope that the House will not mind if I intervene at this early stage in this debate. I would not normally do so on a Friday, but time is short and it might help the House if the Government's position on the Bill were known.

It is a pleasant coincidence to me that the last time that I spoke from the Front Bench on private Members' Bills was in 1989 when I spoke on the Protection of Privacy Bill and the Right of Reply Bill. Those Bills concerned the right of the individual against what was seen as the overwhelming power of the press. They led to reforms in the Press Council and the establishment of the Press Complaints Commission. At the heart of today's Bill is concern about the rights of the individual in relation to the power of what Thomas Hobbes described as that great "leviathan", the state.

Although I have sympathy with some of the broad principles advanced by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), the precise remedies prescribed in this all-embracing Bill are excessive and unnecessary because of the increasing openness of the Government. They would be impracticable—I stress that word because the hon. Gentleman spoke at length about the practicalities. Those remedies would be impracticable to men and women of good will, but more of that in a moment.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the cajoling matter in which he presented the Bill. He has had a consistent and constructive interest in access to public records. The hon. Gentleman introduced the Access to Personal Files Bill in 1987 and the Access to Medical Reports Bill in 1988. Today's Bill goes much further, as it creates an all-embracing public right of access to all records held by public authorities, subject to certain exemptions and the public interest tests contained in clauses 16 to 31.

The scope of the Bill is wide, as it applies to all public authorities. It would be fully retrospective after one year of operation and it would expose some 92 miles of shelved files in the Public Records Office alone to its access requirements. The Bill is designed to override and, therefore, in effect to replace a large number of existing statutory provisions relating to the disclosure of records and information. It is an ambitious Bill and, for that reason, despite its friendly title, I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I believe that it is unworkable.

Before considering the Bill from the point of view of practical implementation, it is right to discuss its aims and

[Mr. Tim Renton]

briefly to set out some general principles. Everyone agrees that democracy can work only if the public are well informed about public issues and political choices.

Sir Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Hear, hear.

Mr. Renton: I have known my hon. Friend for many years; I was sure that he would support that statement, and so do I.

Everyone would also agree that democratic government must be accountable to the electorate and their elected representatives in Parliament and that accountability cannot be effective if the details concerning Government policy and performance are hidden.

Public services also work best if there is openness about what they set out to deliver and how they are performing. As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire recognised in part, that is a key function of the citizens charter in respect of, for example, greater openness about waiting times in the national health service, the performance of schools and the comparative efficiency of local authorities, as audited by the Audit Commission. I suggest that that is the openness of the 1990s, which other democracies are following with interest.

The Bill would take us down a path that some countries took in the 1970s and 1980s, but for no great comparative advantage in terms of the effectiveness of their services and democratic processes.

There is room for fair and genuine debate about the best means to the end in open and accountable government. I have in mind the different answers which men of good will can give to four questions: what are the best means to achieve the end in open government? What records should the public have a right to see? How exactly should justifiable confidentiality be defined? And who should make decisions on the disclosure of information held by public authorities? In my judgment, on each of those four questions the Bill goes further than people of good sense would wish good government to go. Indeed, it goes further than many operational freedom-of-information regimes have gone.

There is a distinction between a policy of open government and one of freedom of information. Open government is about the voluntary creation by the Government of the conditions for an informed democracy. It is about greater transparency and accountability for the delivery of Government services. The Government can take pride in having carried forward the structures of openness in many profoundly significant ways.

"Freedom of information" is a good public relations term for a general public right of access to the records of Government Departments and other public authorities. As the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire said, the Bill would create an all-embracing form of such a general right.

In contrast, and instead of freedom of information, the Government are concentrating their efforts on considered and structured steps to enhance accountability and increase transparency in government. That has been combined with selective statutory rights of access to personal records—as the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire will know—and publication of certain information in statutory public registers.

I have time to give only a few examples, but they are selected from a wide field. The Department of Social Security holds data on millions of people. Increasingly the data are held on computer—national insurance records alone hold 60 million accounts. In line with the Data Protection Acts, "next steps" and the citizens charter, the Department is operating much more openly. People can check their computer records—4,000 did so in 1991.

On health, in recent years the Government have assisted private Members' Bills, including those sponsored by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, allowing patients greater access to their medical records and a say in whether those records should be provided to prospective employer's insurance companies. The hon. Gentleman referred to official complacency. What we have done in social security and health—both of great importance—is provide a fine and increasing safeguard against official complacency.

On food safety, in fairness the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire will recognise—he is a fair man—that inspection is largely a function of local environmental health officers. The enforcement procedures established and reviewed in the Food Safety Act 1990 include much more openness to inspection for Crown bodies. Those were discussed extensively. Enforcement is an open process and inspectors have powers to ensure that defects are quickly remedied.

I could give many other examples, but I know that other hon. Members wish to speak in this short debate. In total, the Government have done much more to create transparency in government than any of their predecessors. On the other side of the coin, in the interests of good government there must be boundaries to the right to see papers and records. The Bill recognises that, but the question then arises of where the boundaries should be drawn and where the exemptions lie.

The Bill covers the usual grounds of defence, security, international relations, law enforcement and personal privacy. I shall confine my remarks to just three points about the structure of exemptions. First, the exemptions under the Bill are much more restrictively drafted than many of the models on which the legislation is based. For example, it contains no exemption for internal working papers, thus creating a much greater presumption in favour of disclosure. Secondly, the Bill sets out to override all—I stress the word "all"—other statutory and common law restricting or prohibiting the disclosure of information. I know of no other freedom of information legislation that does that. The Bill certainly differs from FOI Acts in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States of America, all of which exempt information, the disclosure of which is prohibited by statute.

Mr. Kirkwood: It is a Committee point.

Mr. Renton: It is a very substantial point indeed, relating to the scope of the Bill.

In substituting new public interest tests for other legislative provisions and protecting the confidentiality of certain information, the Bill would impose one of many answers to a difficult conflict of interests—the conflict between the right of the individual or company to have direct access to Government information and the right of the Government, in the interests of the whole country, to preserve confidentiality where it needs to be preserved.

Who decides the public interest? Under the Bill, it is ultimately decided by a commissioner or tribunal of lawyers, who may be wiser or less wise than a Minister. However, they are clearly not elected representatives. That leads me to my third point, which is that, in interpreting exemptions, and particularly the public interest overrides to exemptions, the new enforcement authorities created by the Bill—the commissioner and tribunal—would have to form judgments that are presently made by a court, where necessary in criminal proceedings, or by Ministers accountable to the House.

Under clause 30, the commissioner or tribunal would have to weigh cases in which disclosure would bring an element of benefit and an element of damage, and decide where the public interest lies. Would those decisions, which now fall to a Minister directly accountable to the House, necessarily be better accounted for by a tribunal of lawyers? That is one area where the Bill marks an erosion of the Westminster system of government.

The pros and cons of freedom of information have often been debated and will doubtless be debated many times in the future. But they should not be oversimplified. The core is how the line between disclosure and the confidentiality necessary to government should be drawn, and whether it should be decided by the Government within the disciplines of audit and parliamentary accountability, which I have described briefly, or by the courts or an external commissioner and tribunal, on principles codified in law. It depends on the balance between the benefits of FOI in terms of increased public confidence in the integrity of government on the one hand —the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire stressed that in his opening remarks—and its costs in terms of additional bureaucracy, the potential for distracting officials and Ministers, and the precise place for Westminster in this system.

The results of the Bill would fall far short of a panacea, but they might produce temporary relief for the inflamed political imagination of those in the House and elsewhere who are inclined to see evil behind all Government confidentiality, however much they accept that some confidentiality is justified in theory. The Bill would provide that relief at significant cost to the taxpayer and considerable diminution of the powers of the House. I believe that the candour and constructive self-criticism of government would be impaired.

The Government strongly support greater openness in government and take a pride in their record. I believe that we have contributed more to openness, transparency and accountability in government than any previous Administration. We have accepted the principle of access to personal records where practicable—for example, computerised personal records, health records and local social services or housing records.

However, the Bill would carry access rights beyond the limits of the practicable. We are not persuaded that a general statutory right of access to public records such as the Bill embraces is a necessary part of our policy on openness. We believe that the form of requirements in the Bill is unsatisfactory, not least because of the relationship with existing legislation, much of which has been carefully considered in the House recently, and which the Bill intends to override. It would remove key decisions on disclosure to an unelected commission and tribunal and would significantly erode Westminster traditions.

I have listed some sectors where the Government have made great improvements, but I assure the House that we shall not rest on our laurels. On the contrary, we shall continue to work for greater openness; as and when we can make further advances we shall certainly do so, and tell the House about them.

2.17 pm

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on choosing this topic. I regret that, through the Minister, the Government have been so complacent and negative about the long campaign to end the climate of secrecy that envelops far too many parts of our lives.

The Minister has achieved one thing: he has neatly exposed the difference between the Government and the Opposition. At best, the Government admit some aspects of a citizen's right to be told. We and others believe that it is more a matter of a citizen's right to know. The "I may tell you" approach of the Government smacks of a "We know best" approach and implies that there are some things that people cannot and should not be told. Theirs is an upstairs, downstairs view of the world that smacks of a master-servant relationship. We hon. Members are supposed to be the servants and the electors are supposed to be the masters.

Mr. Renton: The hon. Member is clearly aligning the Labour party with the policy of the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on freedom of information. Is he aware that the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire was quoted in *The Independent* last week as saying that Labour's support for freedom of information goes about as far as Roy Hattersley's support for slimming aids?

Mr. Corbett: We want to go even further than the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Everyone except the Government accepts that freedom of information lies at the heart of a modern democracy and that there is an urgent need of constitutional reform, which the next Labour Government will introduce. We must both extend and protect individuals' rights. We must also guarantee basic rights and, what is more, make them a reality for every citizen. We shall set out those rights in individual Acts to make them available to every citizen.

The Minister, perhaps because of the influence of his other job, brought an artistic flourish to his description of the Government's openness. The Government have trampled on the rights of our free press and independent broadcasters. Millions of pounds were tipped down the drain in pursuing Peter Wright around the courts of the world. The Government's interference with the BBC series "Real Lives" also springs to mind, not to mention their antics over the Security Service Act 1989 and the Official Secrets Act 1989.

As a prelude to our freedom of information Bill, early in the new Parliament we shall provide a statutory guarantee of press freedom. We shall ensure that the right of independent publication is augmented by the right and ability to obtain the information that helps to make press freedom a reality. Our freedom of information Bill—much along the lines of this one, but extended—will establish a general right of access to official information held by national, regional and local government and by public and

[Mr. Corbett]

statutory bodies. That right will rest on the presumption that all information must be freely available. Exemption from that will require a demonstration that the publication of the information is against the national interest or an invasion of personal privacy. Those are similar to the exemptions outlined by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire. If access is refused, reasons will have to be given in writing and the applicant will have to be told of his or her right to complain to an information commissioner and subsequently to an information appeal tribunal set up under the legislation.

We shall welcome debate on these exemptions to ensure that they are as narrow as they can sensibly be. Our Act will repeal the Official Secrets Act and replace it with criminal penalties for the intentional or reckless disclosure of information likely to cause serious injury to the nation, to endanger the safety of a citizen or to assist crime. That idea upsets the Minister, but we shall provide for a public interest defence to allow someone to argue—perhaps a newspaper or a broadcaster—that the information disclosed was in the public interest because it exposed crime, fraud or abuse of authority, or neglect of official duty or other serious misconduct, or because the information had already been published either in the United Kingdom or abroad.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): With the greatest respect, but also with a sense of indignation, I must say that I am interested to learn that the Labour party has a Bill in mind which the House will doubtless discuss at some stage if Labour is returned to power. But we have a Bill before us to which we are giving a Second Reading—a real Bill, not a hypothetical Bill—and I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would briefly deal with it.

Mr. Corbett: I understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying and I can tell him that early next month we will publish our Bill. He knows as well as I do that today's Bill will be still-born because the Government oppose it.

I want to give an example of the stupidities to which this obsession with secrecy on the part of public servants gives rise. It took *The Birmingham Post* on Thursday this week to reveal that yet another inquiry, this time into allegations of bribery, is being held into some police officers serving in D division of the West Midlands police force, which covers my constituency. *The Birmingham Post* got the reluctant West Midlands police to admit tersely that there had been an internal inquiry and that Leicestershire police had been called in to investigate under the eye of the Police Complaints Authority. That was all. The *Post* revealed that initially two senior officers were involved, suspected of having close links with known criminals. The paper was later able to establish, with no help from West Midlands police, that six officers were under investigation. Why were not West Midlands police more open; why did not they announce what had happened? Why did they attempt to keep this knowledge from the people of my constituency and from the rest of Birmingham and the west midlands? Why, seemingly, did a senior officer of the West Midlands police force instruct that a tight lid be kept on the affair?

Such an attitude does great damage to police public relations and it does nothing for the morale of the service. These allegations and their investigation are a source of major concern, seen against the background of the damage that the activities of some members of the former West Midlands serious crime squad—and all that followed from them—has done. The West Midlands police force will not regain the respect of citizens, which it needs and deserves, until it is more open about matters that are of proper concern to the citizens.

After the election, it will fall to a Labour Government to put a freedom of information Act on the statute book. I shall welcome that task.

2.25 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Had it not been for the absence of rosettes, we might have thought that we were at the hustings. I passionately support the Bill to which I think the House should give greater consideration than that given by the Minister of State, Privy Council Office. He must have emerged blinking from the darkness of the Whips Office to be handed a speech of which I have heard various versions and sections in every debate on this topic. I can quote chapter and verse if departmental advisers wish me to do so. It was curious that the Minister could not identify the bits that had been glued to his speech.

The Minister rightly said that in Australia, New Zealand and Canada Conservative Governments took such Bills on board and passed legislation. Before doing so, they published their equivalent of White Papers. If the Minister had given himself enough time to look at those, he would have found that all the reservations and caveats that he advanced were addressed, weighed and disposed of in Committee.

In a democracy three principal reasons underlie such legislation, and they are to be seen in the citizens charter and in much of the admirable legislation that the Government have watched go through the House over the past 11 years. The first of those is the sense of ourselves as citizens. This is our state, our House of Commons and our information. On that first assumption is written our literature, our history and our ideas. To quote Pope,

"What can we reason, but from what we know?"

The second of those reasons is accountable government, as the Minister said. He is on clear ground with that now, in view of the Maastricht agreement and the Single European Act under which Ministers are no longer accountable for huge rafts of Government activity. He will have noted that the House of Lords overturned a statute passed since we were returned in the 1987 election.

The third reason is that such legislation improves the quality of decisions and arguments. The Minister seized upon and identified that, and he was right to do so. Affirmatively, the first reason leads, one hopes, to better decisions by government. Aldridge-Brownhills suffers from the Birmingham northern relief road, and I should like the inquiry report into that matter to be published because we have a right to know about the arguments that were advanced. A Territorial Army officer, Major Kennison, fell from a helicopter in a tragic accident. May we have the inquiry report on that? Not a bit of it.

The Bill is about the way in which we live. I pay tribute to a man who honoured those arguments, to a bonny Scotsman, Norman Buchan, who is missed in the House. Burns' night is tomorrow, and that brought to mind the lines from Burns which Norman Buchan taught me:

"Here's to them that would read.
Here's to them that would write.

None ever feared that the truth would be heard
but them that the truth would indict."

I commend the Bill to the House.

2.28 pm

Sir Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): I support the principle of the Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood). I disagree with some of its details, but perhaps they could be dealt with in Committee.

I have been a civil servant and a diplomat and I recognise the need for confidentiality, but, on the other hand, government is in danger of becoming too secretive. As an historian, I find it puzzling that the papers relating to a miners' strike in Scotland in 1892, 100 years ago, are still not available for historians and that the Hess papers of 1942 are still kept aside. I also find it hard to understand why the secrets of the Ultra Enigma have been concealed.

I clearly understand the Government's dilemma. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister, when he reflects on this debate, to realise that when I was an official and a diplomat, I was far better informed than I have ever been as a Member of Parliament. Were I a journalist I should be much better informed than the average Member of Parliament. This is a profound problem that any Government—I am sure that it will be a Conservative Government—must address soon, with sympathy. Compared with the United States, Israel and many other countries, we are not being given the information that we legitimately need as a democracy.

2.29 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): In the short time available to me, I wish to express my——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed upon Friday 7 February.

Private Members' Bills

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): With the agreement of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

EDUCATION (SCHOOL PREMISES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES, ETC. (NOTICES OF DECEASE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

NATIONAL LOTTERY BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [17 January].

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

CORPORATE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Objection taken. Second Reading what day?

Mr. Ray Powell: With the agreement of the Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

Second Reading deferred till Friday next.

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

ARMED FORCES (LIABILITY FOR INJURY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 27th January, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Brooke relating to Northern Ireland not later than Ten o'clock; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 30th January, notwithstanding the provision of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business)—

(1) Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Heseltine relating to Local Government Finance not later than Ten o'clock;

(2) the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hunt relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or the end of a period of one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, whichever is the later, at which time Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of them; and

(3) the aforesaid Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 3rd February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hurd relating to Overseas Development and Co-operation not later than Ten o'clock; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Points of Order

2.31 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This point of order relates to a matter that has arisen in the past 24 hours. I ask that the Secretary of State for Employment come before the House at the first available opportunity to explain a matter affecting those employed as security guards by the Ministry of Defence. Hitherto, they have always had the right to belong to a trade union, and the trade unions involved are the Transport and General Workers Union and the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, in respect of both of which I should declare an interest.

It now appears that, having negotiated the new arrangements for the security guard force at the Ministry of Defence sites—arrangements to which all union members agreed—the Ministry of Defence has announced that security guards will no longer have the right to belong to trade unions and will withdraw that right. The reason given is that the two unions are affiliated to the Labour party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. We cannot debate the matter now. Do I understand that the hon. Gentleman is asking for a statement?

Mr. Bermingham: Indeed, and I am asking for a statement because it appears that, once again, the Government are flying in the face of the rights of all trade unions and in the face of all European agreements and in the face of liberty. It is GCHQ mark 2, and that is a disgrace.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that you will take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham). Two issues are involved in this that make it essential that there is an immediate statement in the House before we rise today. The first is the withdrawal of the rights of people at work to join, and maintain membership of, a trade union. The second is the unacceptable reason given—that the unions are affiliated to the Labour party. The inference of that is that these people are unpatriotic. That is a disgraceful slur on members of those trade unions, just as it is on the Labour party. I hope that the Secretary of State will explain what has happened and apologise to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There has been no request for a statement today, but I am sure that the points that have been raised will have been heard.

Taylor Report

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

2.34 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate this Adjournment debate. Obviously, the concern arises from the Hillsborough disaster and the subsequent Lord Justice Taylor report of 15 April 1989, which coincided with the semi-final round of the Football Association cup. During the disaster, there were 95 deaths. Several of those who died were my constituents. More than 400 people received hospital treatment. Extremely swiftly, and with a great deal of support at the time, Lord Justice Taylor was commissioned to produce a report, which he duly did.

I have told the Minister that I shall confine my remarks to the findings that are set out in Lord Justice Taylor's interim report, which was published in August 1989, about two-and-a-half years ago. I shall refer especially to chapters 16 to 20.

The title of chapter 16 is "Brief Summary of Causes", and it extends from paragraph 265 to 268. Paragraphs 265 and 266 read:

"The immediate cause of the gross overcrowding and hence the disaster was the failure, when gate C was opened, to cut off access to the central pens which were already overfull.

They were already overfull because no safe maximum capacities had been laid down. No attempt was made to control entry to individual pens numerically and there was no effective visual monitoring of crowd density."

Paragraphs 267 and 268 explain what happened in relation to the layout of the ground.

Chapter 17 is directed to the FA's choice of ground. Paragraph 270 reads:

"Mr. Kelly, the FA's Chief Executive"—

I understand that he still holds that position—

"sought to give reasons for preferring Hillsborough, but the only one which seemed to have any validity was that the 1988 match had been considered a successfully managed event. He admitted that a telephone call from the Chief Executive of the Liverpool Club protesting and putting Liverpool's case had not been mentioned to the FA Committee which finally decided the venue. Mr. Kelly frankly conceded that 'there was an element of unfairness' to Liverpool in choosing Hillsborough for a second time. I think"—

this is Lord Justice Taylor's conclusion—

"the decision was ill-considered. No doubt in future the FA will be more sensitive and responsive to reasonable representations."

Chapter 18 deals with the policing of the event. It is a long chapter but I shall deal only with paragraph 285, which is headed:

"The Police Case at the Inquiry".

The paragraph reads:

"It is a matter of regret that at the hearing, and in their submissions, the South Yorkshire Police were not prepared to concede they were in any respect at fault in what occurred. Mr. Duckenfield, under pressure of cross-examination, apologised for blaming the Liverpool fans for causing the deaths. But, that apart, the police case was to blame the fans for being late and drunk, and to blame the Club for failing to monitor the pens. It was argued that the fatal crush was not caused by the influx through gate C but was due to barrier 124a being defective. Such an unrealistic approach gives cause for anxiety as to whether lessons have been learnt. It would have been more seemly and encouraging for the future if responsibility had been faced."

It is worth saying that the officer in charge, Mr. Duckenfield, and his deputy, Mr. Murray, have had internal police disciplinary charges against them dropped. Mr. Duckenfield was allowed to take early retirement without facing disciplinary charges. It was then suggested by the South Yorkshire police that Mr. Murray should not be allowed to face charges alone because Mr. Duckenfield had gone. Therefore, no action, externally or internally, will be taken against any officer.

Chapter 19 relates to the city council and the safety certificate. Paragraph 286 reads:

"The performance by the City Council of its duties in regard to the Safety Certificate was inefficient and dilatory. The failure to revise or amend the certificate over the period of three years preceding this disaster, despite important changes in the layout of the ground, was a serious breach of duty. There were, as a result, no fixed capacities for the pens. The certificate took no account of the 1981 and 1985 alterations to the ground."

Paragraph 287 states:

"A number of breaches of Green Guide standards were permitted and persisted e.g. the spacing of the crash barriers, the width of perimeter gates and the gradient in the tunnel."

Paragraph 288 states:

"The Advisory Group lacked a proper structure; its procedure was casual and unbusinesslike. Its accountability to the General Purposes Panel was ill-defined."

Chapter 20 deals with the club and Dr. Eastwood, the consultant engineer. In paragraph 290 it states:

"Nevertheless, there are a number of respects in which failure by the club contributed to this disaster. They were responsible as occupiers and invitors for the layout and structure of the ground. The Lepping Lane end was unsatisfactory and ill-suited to admit the numbers invited, for reasons already spelt out."

That report was published two and a half years ago. Since then, there has been a coroner's inquest. I must make it clear that I believe that the rather unusual procedure of holding just one coroner's inquest in a case involving so many deaths was done in good faith. There was no attempt to thwart justice; it was genuinely intended as a vehicle to try to resolve the issues.

At the request of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Joynes, who had lost a son, I went to Sheffield and sat through a morning session of the inquest. It immediately became clear that the setting was wrong. Every interest was represented—the police, the football club, the local authority and others, and all had separate legal representation. They all sat at one table, together with just a couple of representatives of the bereaved families. It was not the right setting in which to consider the issues properly.

I am not criticising the conduct of the inquest, just the structure and procedures that it was obliged to use. I do not believe that it satisfactorily or adequately answered any of the questions raised in the interim report.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that when there has been a tragedy, one thing that helps to ease the pain of people is to know how and why their relatives died. I agree that the inquest was conducted as fairly as it could be, but perhaps it was the wrong format to adopt in a case of multiple death. Should not we devise a better system that would enable each family to help ease its personal pain?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend, who has a detailed and respected knowledge of the law, hits at the core of the problem. None of the families concerned believes that justice—to use the old legal adage—was done and seen to be done. There has been a great deal of grief and suffering

[Mr. Howarth]

and the legal system must devise a means by which justice can be achieved. The all-pervading feeling of all concerned is that justice has not been done or been seen to be done.

In the summer of last year one of my constituents wrote to the Prime Minister and received a reply from his office. She said that she did not feel that justice had been achieved in any of the procedures that had taken place. The reply from the Prime Minister's office was not helpful. I do not wish to quote it directly, but it suggested that, through application to the Attorney-General, there were two options open to those concerned. The first was to seek a judicial review through the Attorney-General; the second, to seek to have set aside the coroner's findings and a fresh inquest held, or some variation of that, so that all the circumstances could be reconsidered. I emphasise that I do not seek to suggest any conspiracy, because I am sure that that letter was written in good faith, in the best spirit, and on the basis of the best information available.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) made a cogent intervention, in reinforcing my point that there appears to be no clear route by which the families concerned can place before the Attorney-General within reasonable time the kind of case that they would need to make to justify either a judicial review or the setting aside of the coroner's findings. Although I am not an expert, I take a close interest in the matter, and my view is the best option would be a judicial review.

In an incident involving multiple deaths, to use my hon. Friend's phrase, it is difficult for any one lawyer or interested family to reach the point where they can make a convincing case to the Attorney-General. There are currently literally scores of different solicitors and legal advisers involved, and there are complex and possibly insoluble questions as to whether a particular action could be funded by legal aid. It is anyway questionable whether someone who is not entitled to legal aid could afford the legal costs involved in compiling a case that would convince the Attorney-General or another of the Law Officers.

The Under-Secretary of State was courteous enough to discuss the matter with me in advance of this Adjournment debate. I acknowledge that he is at something of a disadvantage, because, although the Taylor report comes within the realm of the Home Office, my points are directed, quite properly, at the Attorney-General. However, because of technicalities relating to the procedures of the House, the title of my Adjournment debate is the only one that I could get through the Table Office.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I was at the Sheffield ground on the day of the disaster, and was the second person through the gate where it occurred. In my opinion, that was at the centre of the problems and the tragedy that ensued. Incidentally, I did not walk through the gate but was carried through it. My legs did not touch the ground. Is not my hon. Friend surprised that although I gave evidence to the police, I was not called as a witness? Doubts remain in many minds as to whether the victims' families were correctly treated.

Mr. Howarth: I was aware that my hon. Friend witnessed the tragedy and that he submitted evidence. If one reads carefully the conclusions of the interim report, it is clear that the decision to open the gate was, in all the circumstances, probably right. The fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) is here today is perhaps testimony to that. As I understand it, if the gates had not been opened, my hon. Friend would have been in grave danger of losing his life.

Mr. Loyden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and that gives rise to the question why the situation outside the ground was not dealt with in the first place. Had the grave problem that was emerging there been dealt with, and had the pressure been eased, the second event would not have happened.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The criticism that the report makes is that the communication between the various officers responsible for policing the event was so poor that, at that point, it was too late to do anything other than open the gate, with all the horrendous consequences that followed.

I do not know of any family connected with the event that feels satisfied that enough has been done to hold the organisations or individuals concerned responsible for their actions. I do not think that it is my place to point the finger at any one individual or organisation and say, "That person should be in court and those people held personally responsible." The problem is that there seems to be no clear path to the justice to which the bereaved families feel they are entitled.

I have tabled parliamentary questions to the Attorney-General and have raised the matter repeatedly, as have a number of other hon. Members. It is not good enough to expect the individuals concerned to beat a path to the doors of justice through disparate bits of the law and through the use of various legal advisers. On the basis of the interim findings of the Taylor report, I believe that there is already sufficient evidence to say that those who were responsible for policing the ground—the club, the local authority and others—ought to have their actions further investigated in a legal setting, and I believe that that aim would be best served by a judicial review.

The Attorney-General had the courtesy to meet me on one occasion to discuss the matter. I believe that he is honourable in his concern, but he is perhaps naive—and I do not mean this maliciously—to assume that people can overcome the horrendous complications involved in advancing their case to the point at which they can plonk something watertight on his desk. In my entirely non-partisan desire to try to get justice done in this matter, I believe that the Law Officers ought now to intervene and say, "We recognise that, in this case, justice will be difficult to obtain under the normal procedures. We realise, however, that the police, the football club and Sheffield city council have cases to answer. We think that the best way forward would be for us, the legal officers of the state, to intervene and grant a judicial review."

Those who feel not only a sense of bereavement but a sense of great injustice about what has happened deserve such treatment. In the aftermath of the disaster, they were given assurances by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), the then Prime Minister, and by just about everyone with whom they came in contact that no stone would be left unturned in the pursuit of justice. Their strong feeling, which I have come to share, is that too many stones have been left unturned. The procedures necessary to get the matter into the right legal format to

allow it to be properly investigated, and to allow responsibility to be attached to those who bear responsibility, have not yet been used. The quicker the Law Officers agree with that, and grant a judicial review or some kind of coroner's procedure, the better. I strongly believe that a judicial review would be the best way forward.

2.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): Little time is left to me, so I shall make one point right at the beginning of my speech that ought to be stressed—it is not in the Government's, the Attorney-General's or any other Minister's gift to grant a judicial review. That is open to the judiciary, after an application has been made to it. The Government may not intervene in any way. It is a judicial, not a ministerial decision.

I thank the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) for providing an opportunity for this matter to come before the House once more. Even those of us who were not present or did not experience the trauma of seeing friends or relatives injured or killed before our very eyes cannot escape the indelible images created by the terrible events that day at Hillsborough. I know that the hon. Member receives constant reminders of the disaster from the continuing distress of his constituents, as he said today. I welcome this opportunity to go through the way in which the various bodies with responsibilities in this area have sought to respond to this dreadful and unforeseen disaster.

"Unforeseen" is in many ways, I think, the key word. It is easy to say now that the possibility should have been foreseen—and of course it should. But nothing like this, thank God, had happened before—not in all the previous years of capacity crowds at football matches or pop concerts—and a disaster of this magnitude was simply not something anybody conceived of as imaginable, much less as actually happening.

Cataclysms which come apparently out of the blue nearly always have multiple causes which come together fortuitously to enable something dreadful and quite out of the ordinary to happen. These may include what the insurers call acts of God, natural causes and human carelessness, or deliberate misconduct. Any one of those, taken separately, would have had little effect. Coming together, they can be devastating as they were here.

As with many less far-reaching accidents, the degree of blame which may attach to any of the people involved in the run-up to a catastrophe may not be in any way commensurate with the degree of harm caused. This must be pre-eminently a case where that is true, as Lord Taylor comments in relation to the police, the local authority, the club and others whom the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

It might help the House if, having made those observations, I went through what has already been done to seek out and address the causes that led to this dreadful incident.

Within two days of the disaster, Lord Justice Taylor had been commissioned to inquire into its causes and his inquiry was under way. As a result, the West Midlands police force undertook two major investigations into the events of 15 April 1989. The first of those investigations was, of course, the formal inquiry by Lord Justice Taylor, which was commissioned by the Home Secretary. The investigation, which was inaugurated by the Taylor inquiry, involved some 440 officers from the West Midlands police force. They took some 3,776 statements, as well as taking advantage of video films from three separate sources which provided, in all, some 71 hours of further evidence. That vast store of evidence was carefully sifted. I think that it is fair to say that the interim report —the one which the hon. Gentleman talked about most particularly—of Lord Justice Taylor on the disaster gives a very clear picture of police activity on the day.

The inquest into the deaths at Hillsborough, which took more than 100 days to examine the material facts, constituted a second inquiry into those events. The hon. Gentleman referred in particular to the inquest. It served, in fact, a separate function, in that the law states that the purpose of an inquest is to ascertain the identity of the deceased and how, when and where he came by his death. The coroners rules provide that neither the coroner nor the jury shall express any opinion on any other matters—hence much of the frustration to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

In addition, the rules specifically prohibit the framing of an inquest verdict in such a way as to appear to determine any question of criminal liability on the part of a named person, or civil liability. Any issue of civil or criminal liability is a matter for the civil or criminal courts, not the coroner's inquest.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lloyd: No, I will not give way because I have only six minutes left to me. If I have time later to do so, I will.

In the third inquiry, which followed up its work for Lord Justice Taylor, the West Midlands police force conducted a further major investigation with a view to discovering whether the disaster resulted from, or was made worse by, criminal activity by any individual.

The Director of Public Prosecutions concluded that the results did not indicate that anyone should be made the subject of criminal proceedings. Perhaps I could add a comment on that. The conclusions at which the Director of Public Prosecutions arrived mean that, so far as anyone can discover—the evidence that has been amassed has been considerable—this terrible disaster was not the result of criminal activity. The result is that neither Chief Superintendent Duckenfield nor Superintendent Murray —nor, for that matter, any other person—has been charged with a crime.

For anyone other than a police officer that would be the end of the matter. For police officers, though, there remains the question whether, without having good or sufficient cause, they failed to fulfil all the requirements of their role as police officers. Had they, perhaps, been guilty of a deliberate neglect of duty, or had there been professional failure or momentary loss of "grip"? Were there any faults to be addressed in the organisation as a whole?

All those matters have been addressed in the intervening years. One matter Hillsborough pointed up, tragically, was the need for thorough training of police commanders. The Association of Chief Police Officers has since developed appropriate training courses, and those who act as police commanders at such events now have the benefit of preparation, which unfortunately, was not available to Mr. Duckenfield.

However, as Lord Justice Taylor said, with such truth, in paragraph 25 of his final report,

"Complacency is the enemy of safety".

[Mr. Lloyd]

After Hillsborough, I believe that anyone responsible for crowd control where large numbers of people are present will find it difficult to be complacent ever again. I hope that those grieving might draw a little comfort from that.

Another investigation of the event, of the day, therefore covered complaints that had been made regarding police behaviour. That investigation involved the taking of a further 5,341 statements, as well as the scrutiny of all the material which had previously been examined. It was supervised throughout by the Police Complaints Authority, which subsequently expressed itself satisfied that it had been properly and thoroughly conducted.

I know that many people would feel more confidence in those investigations if the report could be published, but this is one of those unfortunate instances where decisions taken to protect one branch of the public militates against another. The courts have decided, in a number of judgments, that people would be less willing to complain of bad behaviour by the police if there were any risk that what they had said would become generally known. As a result, they have said that such statements are immune from disclosure, in the public interest, with the result that the report of this investigation cannot be made public. I believe that it would be only on application to a court by an injured party that a decision could be made to publish the report in this case. Again, that is a matter for the courts and for the law, not for me. I embark upon that observation with the humility of a non-professional.

To maintain discipline within the force, the Police Complaints Authority and the deputy chief constable are required to consider whether there are ways in which an officer may have failed in his duty. If so, they are required to arrange for a formal hearing of the charges against him. That was done. After receiving the report of the complaint investigation, the PCA decided that Chief Superintendent Duckenfield and Superintendent Murray should face disciplinary charges.

A police disciplinary hearing is held in private. It is concerned only with whether the officer concerned may have failed to conform to police discipline. The hearing would not, therefore, in any way contribute to public knowledge of what happened on the day; nor would it do more than receive and consider the evidence, which is already known, as to the propriety of Mr. Duckenfield's conduct.

I wished to make a number of other important points, but time is short. The hon. Gentleman expressed great concern about the matter of the coroners court. He rightly said that it is not a matter for me, but I shall speak to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General to ensure that he sees the hon. Gentleman's speech in the *Official Report*. I am certain that he will want to reflect carefully on what the hon. Gentleman said because I know that he, in common with everyone else who has any knowledge of this horrific event, understands something of the anguish and burning frustration felt by the hon. Gentleman's constituents. He has expressed those feelings strongly this afternoon. I hope that what I said will be some help in illuminating the situation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at four minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 27 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Petrol Prices

1. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on present petrol prices in the United Kingdom.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): Petrol prices are currently estimated to be about 48p a litre for four-star and about 44½p a litre for unleaded petrol.

Mr. Cox: I thank the Minister for that reply. He will be aware of the recent increases in petrol prices and the effect that they have had on the entire day-to-day life of the country. Can he tell the House something about the agreement made on 13 December by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, which I understand will lead to a 6 per cent. increase—the equivalent of 12p per gallon—in the price of petrol, to come into force in 1993? The agreement was signed in Brussels with other Euro-Ministers.

Mr. Moynihan: To my knowledge, no such agreement was made. Of course, I will look into the specific points that the hon. Gentleman made and ask my right hon. Friend to reply. The hon. Gentleman mentioned prices. They are set by the market and reflect international trading conditions. The recent increases were in line with movements in the Rotterdam spot market.

Sir Anthony Meyer: If prices reflect international conditions, can my hon. Friend explain why in Britain, almost uniquely, there is no differential between petrol and diesel prices?

Mr. Moynihan: I accept that at present diesel prices are only about ½p a litre below unleaded prices. As I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware, the reason for that is that the demand for gas oil, which is equivalent to diesel, is high at this time of the year because it is used for heating. That high demand tends to push up prices.

Energy Efficiency

2. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the amounts allocated to encourage improvements in energy efficiency among industrial and domestic electricity and gas customers in 1991-92.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): Public expenditure on energy efficiency benefiting such customers will total over £1 billion in 1991-92. Expenditure by supply utilities is a matter for these companies.

Dr. Howells: It is not just a matter for the utilities, because, of course, energy efficiency is important to all of us. Is it not the case that when the Government privatised the electricity and gas companies they created not a range of companies which could induce real competition for the benefit of customers and the environment but large companies with near monopoly supply status which are not in the least interested in energy efficiency? They are interested in maximising profits from sales of electricity and gas. That cannot be good for the environment.

Mr. Wakeham: That is not a fair analysis of the position. A great deal of competition is available to the whole range of industrial customers which was not available before. At the end of the transitional arrangement there will be competition throughout the whole of the industry.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the suggestion of the Office of Gas Supply that an E factor should be introduced into the gas tariff formula to fund cost-effective investment in energy efficiency. We shall await with interest further developments in that, as well as Professor Littlechild's intiative in publishing a consultation document on energy efficiency in the electricity industry. We shall follow that with great interest.

Mr. Dickens: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government have increased the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office to £59 million? Is not that a massive 40 per cent. increase in the money that we give to that office? Does not that show a total commitment to the preservation of energy?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, indeed. Further increases are planned for 1993-94 and for 1994-95. By and large, energy efficiency is profitable for the user of electricity. Therefore, many of the Government's intiatives using those funds suggest ways in which energy consumers can save energy.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Why does not the Government give the regulator the power to direct electricity-generating companies to use their massive profits to invest in home insulation and to improve the energy efficiency of industry?

Mr. Wakeham: The regulator, whose task has been laid down by Parliament, is perfectly entitled to come to me if he thinks that his powers are not enough. He does not share the hon. Gentleman's view that he should have further powers to achieve his objectives.

Energy-intensive Ratio

3. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the change in the United Kingdom's energy-intensity ratio since 1983; and what are the corresponding figures for the rest of the EC and with Japan.

Mr. Moynihan: Latest available OECD figures show that between 1983 and 1989 the United Kingdom's energy ratio improved by 11 per cent.—more than any other

European Community country or Japan. The improvement for the EC as a whole was 4·2 per cent; for Japan it was 7 per cent.

Mr. Arnold: Will my hon. Friend quantify the savings to this country as a result of a number of relevant programmes being run by the Government?

Mr. Moynihan: Savings resulting from the Energy Efficiency Office's programmes alone have led to a current annual energy saving worth more than £500 million a year.

Mr. Rost: My hon. Friend has identified the potential of £10 billion worth of energy saving a year which is cost effective. Can he give any sign of the time scale that he hopes will be achieved and what impact that would have on the energy ratio that he has just quoted?

Mr. Moynihan: I cannot give my hon. Friend a precise timetable. It is the Government's view that if we can implement the package of energy efficiency measures, not least through, for example, the home energy efficiency scheme, additional resources for the energy management assistance scheme, the best practice programme and our regional and publicity activities, we shall be well on the way to achieving significant additional savings.

Coal Mines

4. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many pits were open in *(a)* January 1986 and *(b)* January 1992.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): British Coal had 133 producing collieries in operation at the beginning of the financial year 1986-87, which produced 88 million tonnes of coal. There are currently 53 collieries in operation, which are expected to produce 68 million tonnes this financial year.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Secretary of State recall the letter sent by Mr. Ian MacGregor, the former chairman of the coal board, to every miner in June 1984, which described as "absolutely untrue" the claim by mine union leaders that the Government planned to reduce the number of working pits to under 100? The letter said:

"I state categorically and solemnly that you have been misled."

Was Mr. MacGregor lying, or did he not know? Should not the Minister give mineworkers an apology?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The chairman of the coal board made a fair assessment of market conditions at that time. The hon. Gentleman will know that the British coal industry must respond to a competitive environment. The best way to secure future jobs and future collieries is to win the largest possible share of the electricity-generation market, and the contracts are to be renewed next year.

Mr. Butler: Would any of the pits that have been closed still be open but for unfair competition from Germany? Why are the Germans allowed to subsidise their coal production so much?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The European Commission is in dispute with the German Government over the level of their production subsidies, but I assure my hon. Friend that imports from Germany are minimal and that the real competition for the British coal mining industry comes from other fuels.

Mr. Eadie: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that the miners of this country feel betrayed by the Government? Is he aware that they posed me the question, "Is anybody in the Government prepared to stand up and fight to defend the coal industry?" Is he further aware that they feel that the chairman of British Coal acts as if he is a clone of the Government?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am by no means gloomy about the prospects for British Coal, but its future success and security depend on its becoming more competitive and productive so that it can secure a large part of the British energy market in years ahead. That can be delivered by the industry, rather than by the words of politicians.

Mr. Janman: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be wrong to keep uneconomic pits open by trying to protect them from competition from imported coal? Does he agree that it would be totally wrong to start imposing levies or some form of import quota on coal coming into Britain, partly because that would jeopardise hundreds of jobs in the electricity industry, notably at two power stations in my constituency?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes several fair and valid points. If we were to force the electricity-generating companies to take coal in volumes and at prices that they do not want, the certain consequence would be higher electricity prices for the domestic customer and for the rest of British industry, which could in turn be bad for long-term job prospects.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister tell us why the Government insist on making British miners redundant when they work in the most efficient collieries in western Europe? Can he name any other industry in Britain that is twice as efficient as its west German counterpart, but which, nevertheless, is suffering from job losses? Finally, why will the Government not allow the extra European funds to be spent in the coalfields to make up for the jobs that have been lost? Is it not true that the Government want to divert that money to keep down the poll tax in Wandsworth and Westminster?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: On European Community funds, I regret that Commissioner Millan is not releasing the RECHAR money, which we could well use in areas affected by colliery closures. I remind the hon. Gentleman that since the Government took office all the redundancies in the British coal industry have been voluntary and that the terms offered to miners affected are among the most generous in British industry and can reach £37,000 per man affected.

Oil Industry

5. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what he is doing to promote opportunities for the British oil industry in winning orders and contracts overseas.

Mr. Wakeham: Last November, I visited Vietnam, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea in order to promote the United Kingdom's wide-ranging expertise in the energy

sector. I hope that my visit provided opportunities for the British oil industry to take part in the development of oil and gas fields in that region.

Mr. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend accept that that news should be welcomed on both sides of the House? Is it not the case that on the trip he was identifying markets, boosting British business, ensuring that British companies can take advantage of that business and, in the end, creating jobs back here at home?

Mr. Wakeham: Yes, after 25 years of successful development of the North sea, our expertise is some of the best, if not the absolute best, in the world. It was important that in my visit to Vietnam, for example, I was accompanied by British business men from British Petroleum, Enterprise Oil, Shell, Lasmo, British Gas and Barclays bank. They all believe Vietnam to be a good market for British expertise and jobs to follow.

Mr. Dalyell: Before the Secretary of State sets sail to be Governor of Hong Kong, will he exercise his subtle and calming qualities on behalf of the 5,500 British expatriates, many of whom are Scots engineers working in the oil industry in Libya? Will he look at last Monday's Adjournment debate and see that there is another side to the story, before we start, heaven knows, on sanctions that will hurt the 36 British companies in Libya, which are led, by for example, Brown and Root, and which could lead to something worse in the form of another strike?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is also talking of events in the aftermath of the Lockerbie tragedy. There are people who are required to appear before the courts either in Britain or in America, and all civilised people will wish to see that happen. As the hon. Gentleman invites me to read the Adjournment debate, I will.

Dr. Michael Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that as we are leaders in many forms of oil technology we have every reason to expect that we shall get some good export orders for that technology? Will he join me in congratulating the Petroleum, Science and Technology Institute in Edinburgh on its work on propagating Britain's ability in the oil industry?

Mr. Wakeham: Certainly, that institute is of the highest international standard and it is doing good work here and overseas providing advice and assistance. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Sir P. Morrison) had a lot to do with its founding when he was a Minister in this Department.

Mr. Doran: Does the Secretary of State agree with the recent criticism that the British offshore supplies service industry is failing to take advantage of world opportunities? It has a comfortable market here with the North sea at its doorstep. The huge world market out there was worth $330 billion between 1989 and 1992, but the industry has won only a small share of that business. No amount of globe trotting by the Secretary of State will sort that problem out. What will he do about that at home?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is being unfair to the North sea supplies industry. The total world value of those markets is about £40 billion a year and one third of all of the orders won by United Kingdom suppliers are for overseas markets. That is worth about £2 billion a year of the overseas markets won by the industry serving the North sea. That is a very creditable record. More can be done and more is being done and we shall encourage the industry to go out and get more business wherever it is; but it has made a good start.

Home Energy Labelling

6. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress the Government have made in establishing a standard assessment procedure for home energy labelling.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government have introduced a standard assessment procedure for rating the energy performance of homes. I am pleased to say that both the leading organisations which carry out home energy labelling, the National Energy Foundation and MVM-Starpoint, have agreed to incorporate the procedure into their labels. That will enable consumers to make direct comparisons between labels.

Mr. Burns: I thank my hon. Friend for his extremely helpful reply. Will he accept that it is of particular interest to householders in Chelmsford because they accept that home energy labelling will lead to substantial energy savings?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I know that my hon. Friend has a long-standing interest in promoting energy efficiency in his constituency. These developments will help all those buying a home, moving house or taking a house to rent to choose dwellings that will not only save money on their fuel bills, but help to improve the environment.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Given the importance of home energy labelling in saving energy and the Government's excellent record of funding an eightfold increase in expenditure in the past 12 years, will my hon. Friend consider the possibility of incorporating energy labelling with other initiatives undertaken by the National House-Building Council so that new homes have adequate levels of energy labelling and, therefore, energy efficiency?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, we believe that the recent moves would give greater assistance to the organisations that are undertaking energy efficiency assessments of homes, including new ones. I urge all those considering the purchase of a house—including brand-new houses—to look carefully at the energy efficiency or otherwise of those dwellings. An authoritative energy-labelling system will assist them to do that.

Coal Output

7. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the output per man year in British Coal's mines in *(a)* 1978-79, *(b)* 1983-84 and *(c)* 1990-91.

Mr. Wakeham: The output per man year in British Coal's mines was 448 tonnes in 1978-79, 470 tonnes in 1983-84 and 1,181 tonnes in 1990-91—an increase of 163 per cent. over 11 years.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Although the trend in the figures is most gratifying, thanks to the enormous investment by the Government, does my right hon. Friend agree that British Coal is still not competitive with coal from Australia,

South Africa, Colombia and the United States? Much additional work has to be done to increase productivity further.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government have supported the coal industry since 1979 with a total investment of £17 billion and productivity has improved, particularly in recent years. As the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) said, productivity of British mines is the highest in Europe, but major exporting countries such as Australia and the United States achieve higher productivity. British Coal therefore needs to continue its efforts to raise productivity still further.

Mr. Redmond: Does the Secretary of State accept that the improvement in productivity is partly due to the fact that the number of registered disabled people employed by British Coal has fallen? Is he aware that that figure is now 0·4 per cent., which is way below the guidelines laid down in legislation? Does he intend to prosecute British Coal for its failure to maintain the percentage of registered disabled people employed in the industry?

Mr. Wakeham: On the general point, I do not believe that the substantial improvement in productivity has arisen through a reduction in the number of disabled people in the mines. The hon. Gentleman is being neither reasonable nor fair to the management or work force in British mines and is not taking account of the pain and suffering through which some of them had to go to achieve that improvement. I shall not necessarily take the hon. Gentleman's figures on the disabled as being correct, but I shall certainly make inquiries of British Coal to find out what the position is, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Batiste: However successful British Coal is in the future in building on its outstanding success in recent years and improving productivity, one of its basic problems is that it can sell only coal. Should not one of the objectives of our privatisation programme be to give British Coal, or whoever the private company may be, the freedom to produce electricity from its coal and to sell that electricity through the national grid?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion. However, the form and shape of privatisation will not be determined until after the general election. Those who have any doubts about it should note that there is scope for further improvements in productivity. I have received an encouraging report from Boyds, the US mining engineering company, which has reviewed British Coal's colliery operations and found much scope for further productivity improvements. It concludes that British Coal should be able to compete with the price of imported coal while continuing to improve safety standards.

Mr. Barron: The whole House will want to congratulate the British miners on doing everything that has been asked of them over a number of years and achieving that massive increase in productivity.

The generators are now buying coal at 3 per cent. less than before privatisation. Given that 70 per cent. of the generators' costs is the cost of British coal, will the Secretary of State explain why the cost of electricity for more than 21 million households has risen by 40 per cent. during the same period?

Mr. Wakeham: It represents some 25 per cent. of the cost of electricity. Electricity prices have fallen by some 2 per cent. in the past seven years, compared with an increase of 22 per cent. in real terms under Labour—or 2 per cent. every six weeks.

Overhead Power Lines

8. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to announce the terms of the inquiry into the plans by the National Grid Company to erect new overhead power lines in North Yorkshire and Cleveland.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The public inquiry will start in Northallerton on 19 May. My Department is writing to all those who have been registered as objectors to the applications, with details of the arrangements.

Mr. Hague: I thank my hon. Friend for announcing the inquiry today. Is he aware that my constituents remain strongly opposed to the proposed overhead power lines and are rightly concerned at their impact on the rural landscape? Will he confirm that the inquiry will be wide ranging and will pay close attention not only to the environmental impact of the proposed lines but to whether they are needed at all for the national grid to meet its licence standards?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am well aware of the views of many of my hon. Friend's constituents in this matter. I assure them that both the issues mentioned by my hon. Friend will be considered at the public inquiry.

Mr. Dobson: Does the Minister think that it is satisfactory for the people of Teesside to be faced with an application for a power station, another for a gas plant for the power station, and a separate application for the overhead line? Would not it have been more sensible to request all those concerned with the project to put forward their plans together and subject them all to just one public inquiry?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am quite satisfied with the structure and scope of the inquiry as announced.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the terms of reference for the public inquiry that he has announced today will allow the inspector the option of recommending that my right hon. Friend refuse the National Grid Company's application? Does he agree that the private sector electricity industry makes it ever more important that safeguards should be built in to the process so that the need factor and the environmental impact are taken into account?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The National Grid Company has a number of statutory obligations, including that of running a co-ordinated and efficient transmission system. The need for those new lines to discharge that obligation will be considered by the inquiry. I agree that it is an advance to have the industries in the private sector, regulated by the public sector, rather than having ownership, operation, regulation and the planning system all in the Government's hands.

Scottish Coal Industry

9. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans for the expansion of the coal industry in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The future size of the coal industry in Scotland will depend on the success of British Coal and other mine operators, including the Monktonhall mineworkers' consortium, in producing coal at competitive prices.

Mr. Hogg: Is the Minister aware that there were more than 17,000 people employed in the Scottish coal industry in 1984, but by 1989 that figure had fallen to 3,480 and it will be even smaller now? Will the Minister commit himself and the Government to the development of the coal industry in Scotland and say more about the Government's intentions for Monktonhall, lest Yorkshire face the same problems as Scotland, as the Bishop of Durham made clear this weekend?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are still considerable quantities of good-quality coal in Scotland and I am confident that the industry will be able to make a success of producing coal at competitive prices. As regards Monktonhall mineworkers' consortium, it is encouraging that a group of ex-mineworkers have applied to British Coal to take over the pit, and I hope that they can make a success of it.

Mr. Hood: The Minister's enthusiasm sounds a bit hollow, especially as the Government ran away from Monktonhall and the idea of developing the Scottish coalfields. If the Government have any interest in coal, the Minister must agree to reconsider the franchise and develop the coal industry, which produces low sulphur coal and is highly efficient. The Scottish coal industry is waiting to be developed, not vandalised as the Government have vandalised the coal industry in general.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since 1979 the Government have given £17 billion to the British coal industry by way of grant and write-offs. In return, we require the industry to become productive and efficient so that it can win the largest possible share of the future market for electricity generation. I am confident that it will rise to that challenge, which must be faced whether the industry is in private or public hands.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the figures given demonstrate clearly that nationalisation has failed the Scottish coal industry and that the only hope now is that it will be privatised in the imminent future?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The future of the industry will be best served in private ownership. That is why, after the next election, we shall introduce firm proposals for returning the industry to the private sector.

Electricity Supply

11. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are his plans to assist with the repair and protection of the electricity supply in the event of severe weather conditions.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Repair and protection of electricity supply in the event of severe weather conditions is the responsibility of each of the regional electricity distribution companies.

Mr. Barnes: That is an inadequate answer, given that more than a year ago there was a severe weather crisis throughout the country, especially in the east midlands district where 2 million people were without supplies, some of them for a considerable period. The Government did nothing and have apparently learnt nothing from the experience. They should have declared a state of emergency and ensured that Bellwin money was made available to councils so that they could take emergency action. Why have the Government learnt nothing from the experience, and why are they proposing to do nothing if a crisis emerges shortly, as it could?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No distribution network in the world could have survived without damage the severe weather which struck that part of Britain in December 1990, but the regional electricity company concerned, with help from other companies and from overseas, did what it could in the circumstances to connect those who were temporarily cut off. It is an insult to the many managers and workers who responded so well for the hon. Gentleman to imply that they were less than efficient and hard working in those difficult circumstances.

Mr. Sayeed: Will my hon. Friend take this opportunity to pay tribute to the workers in the electricity industry who, despite foul weather and difficult circumstances, managed to restore supplies so swiftly?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The subsequent report on the incident showed that the company, its staff and workers responded magnificently in the difficult circumstances. I do not believe that any more could have been done—certainly not if the company had still been in the public sector.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Will the Minister consider holding a meeting with representatives of Hydro-power, which serves the most isolated communities in Scotland which are subjected regularly to the most severe weather conditions? Is he aware of the severe difficulties experienced in late December and early January when people in remote communities—often elderly people living alone—were without power for more than 48 hours, despite the best efforts of workers to reconnect power? Surely the Government have a responsibility to investigate mechanisms to reduce failures to a minimum.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No system in the world can be wholly immune to bad weather conditions, but there are always lessons to be learnt. The report into the East Midlands Electricity Company, in the light of the severe storms of 1990, has been made widely available so that other electricity companies can learn from that experience.

Deep-mined Coal

12. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by what proportion productivity has been improved in deep-mined colleries operated by British Coal during the last three years.

Mr. Wakeham: Poductivity in deep mines operated by British Coal improved by 29 per cent. in the last three years to December 1991.

Mr. Hardy: Can the Minister tell the House of any other industry in Britain that could equal the productivity achievement of British miners? Is he concerned about the rewards for that achievement—the brutal loss of employment, the economic devastation of the coalfields, the adverse effect on our balance of payments, which will get worse, the excessive and inevitable energy dependence, and the deceitful diversion of funds from the coalfields as a result of the Government's approach to the European money that should be available to us?

Mr. Wakeham: I repeat that the European Community money should be for the benefit of coal communities, and we very much regret that the European Commission has not released the funds. It is not the Government who are blocking the money—it is the European Commission.

I have been the first to pay tribute to improvements in productivity in the coal industry, but they must continue if the industry is to provide, as I believe that it can, the bulk of supplies to fossil-fuel generators in the years to come. If the hon. Gentleman believes otherwise, he is inviting electricity consumers to pay over the odds for their electricity.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Secretary of State agree that despite the tremendous advances in productivity made by the employees of British Coal, the perverse reward that the Government give them is to squeeze the British coal industry between the upper and nether millstones? The upper millstone consists of the new gas plants, which are protected by their 15-year contracts. The nether millstone is the nuclear industry, which is protected by the mysterious ENOR—the existing nuclear operating regime —which protects the nuclear industry so that all its power stations will run whenever they are available to run, a condition which may be applied to Sizewell B as well.

Mr. Wakeham: I have made it abundantly clear that the licences of the regional electricity companies require them to purchase from the cheapest suppliers. If the cheapest supplies are from gas, they will purchase gas; if it is coal, I would expect them to use coal-fired methods.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Secretary of State has something of a reputation for being the Lord Whitelaw of the Government. Will he use his experience and wisdom to sort out the ridiculous dispute affecting the coalfield communities and the money that is due to them? The technical obstacle relates to ring-fencing of local government money. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the substantial sum that the European Community wants to give us, and which the coalfield communities want to receive, is given now when it is needed? Surely the right hon. Gentleman has the wisdom to sort that out.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that it is wisdom that is required but if I can do anything, I will. The position is clear: the United Kingdom has paid its contributions to the Commission, and the Commission has the money. We are entitled—and we expect—to get that money back.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

13. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the level of carbon dioxide emissions that are saved in the United Kingdom every year by the use of nuclear power.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: If the electricity currently provided by nuclear power stations were to be generated by coal, the United Kingdom would emit about 55 million tonnes more carbon dioxide, increasing total emissions by about 10 per cent. per year.

Mr. Mans: If the Government decide to run down the nuclear industry, apart from the loss of 120,000 jobs in the north-west, in the area that I represent, would it be possible to meet the Government's target for reduced carbon dioxide emissions by the year 2005, let alone by the year 2000, under the Labour party's policy?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It would not be possible to meet our environmental obligations by shutting down the nuclear industry. It is also true that the two main Opposition parties have energy policies which are flatly contradicted by their environmental policies.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Duchy Visit

29. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next plans to visit the duchy.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr. Chris Patten): I am chairing a meeting of the duchy council on 29 January and I plan to visit the county palatine on 7 March. I very much look forward to both engagements.

Mr. Arnold: When my right hon. Friend visits the county palatine, will he hold a meeting with tenants and perhaps point out to them that a standard rate of 35p in the pound, which was described as preposterous by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), was the rate levied by the last Labour Government?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is, of course, entirely correct. I believe that the last Labour Government but one put up taxes in eight Budgets. The last Labour Government put up the standard rate to 35p. The shadow Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), was a member of that Government. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary said with characteristic understatement:

"Dogs bark, cats miaow and the Labour party puts up taxes."

Mr. Grocott: Is it too much to expect that the Lord President, on one of his journeys away from the capital, will take the opportunity to apologise unreservedly to the people of this country for his gross error of judgment in imposing the poll tax? As that key area of his governmental responsibilities so far was such a monumental disaster, does he not think that people would be well advised in the weeks ahead to treat any of his judgments, prophesies or predictions with derision?

Mr. Patten: I shall certainly put that point to my right hon. Friend the Lord President when he comes to the

Chamber a little later to answer questions. Speaking for myself as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, I am sure that it is a safe prediction that bills for local government services will be higher in local authorities where Labour is in control and that the standard of service will be lower.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Would my right hon. Friend care to come to the county town of Lancaster to see how outstandingly well our schools, under local management, are spending their money now that they have been freed from an extravagant county council which never had the right priorities and always deprived our schools of the money that they should have had?

Mr. Patten: I very much agree with my hon. Friend that local management of schools has been a great success. It has given parents and teachers much more responsibility for running their own schools and has freed the schools from the dead hand of local education bureaucracy in many places.

Blackpool

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to visit Blackpool.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have no plans to visit Blackpool in the immediate future.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Chancellor aware that not so long ago I met a chap in Blackpool who said to me, "When you see that Chancellor of the Duchy, tell him that I want to give him a piece of my mind: not only is the poll tax three times higher than the rates, but I have lost my job, my wife has been waiting for an operation for two years, my daughter has lost her maternity grant through this Tory Government and my son has lost his income support—so when you see the chairman of the Tory party, will you tell him that I want to meet him to discuss this matter at the top of the Blackpool Tower?"

Mr. Patten: It sounds as though the high point of that person's career was his encounter with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to tell the gentleman that he might well see me in future as I shall be returning to the town in which I was born.

Mr. Burt: Is my right hon. Friend aware that some three weeks ago I spoke to the business community in Blackpool, who expressed concern about the possibility of local government reform? One thing in particular that frightens the business community is the possibility of an elected regional assembly for the north-west, with powers to tax, which would inevitably be dominated by the cities of Liverpool and Manchester, to the detriment of everyone else in the area. Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to inform the House that that is certainly not one of the options for local government reform that he is considering?

Mr. Patten: We are certainly not considering that option, which would produce a further layer of government, another regiment of politicians, another army of civil servants and even higher taxes from a Labour Government; fortunately, however, there will not be a Labour Government.

Mr. Winnick: When the right hon. Gentleman next takes the opportunity to visit Blackpool, will he refer to the fact that according to the Government's own figures which have been supplied to me, 38 per cent. of all pensioners have incomes below £70 per week? Will the Chancellor bear it in mind that Labour is determined that justice shall be done for our retired people, despite all the smears, accusations and Government lies which come daily from Tory central office?

Mr. Patten: I very much agree with those Labour spokesmen who argued in the past that we should look, above all, at pensioners' net incomes. I would point out how much better pensioners have done under this Government than under our predecessor in terms of pensioners' net incomes. I would also point out how much their savings would be clobbered by the inflation that would be unleashed by a Labour Government's economic policies.

Duchy Visit

31. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next intends to visit the duchy.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) some moments ago.

Mr. Bowis: When my right hon. Friend is next in the duchy, will he make a point of meeting the management and employees of Coats Viyella and reassuring them that under the Conservative party in government there will be no question of a national minimum wage and that it will not be necessary for them to consider moving 10,000 employees—one third of its work force—to jobs abroad? However, to keep those jobs here, we must have a Conservative Government.

Mr. Patten: I noticed that the chief executive of Coats Viyella was quoted yesterday in one newspaper as saying that——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: And Ford.

Mr. Patten: I will return to Ford, if I get the opportunity—which I hope will now be afforded me.

The chief executive of Coats Viyella said that he thought that there were 10,000 jobs at risk in his firm from the Labour party's proposals for a statutory minimum wage. Many of those jobs are in the north-west. I noticed also that the chief executive of Courtauld's said that the Labour party's proposals for a statutory minimum wage would lead to big job losses. We all know that Labour's proposals for a statutory minimum wage would have devastating consequences for job prospects right across our country. I guess that in referring to that issue in the past few weeks we have been guilty of understating the size of the problem.

Mr. Enright: When the——

Hon. Members: Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Mr. Tony Banks: It is a non-job anyway.

Mr. Enright: I nearly called him the chairman of the Tory party—I apologise.

When the Chancellor next visits the Duchy of Lancaster, will he kindly explain why the Government are

cheating on the RECHAR money and thus depriving the coalfields of Lancashire and Yorkshire of funds that are rightly theirs? As the Chancellor's friends should know, the Government have been warned every year—from the days of Mr. Vredeling until the present time—that additionality is essential, and that this country is breaking the rules.

Mr. Patten: I observed the way in which the Commissioner concerned applied the rules when he was Secretary of State for Scotland.

I shall take great pleasure in saying to those to whom the hon. Gentleman wishes me to speak—here comes the opportunity that I mentioned earlier—that, as the chairman of Ford in Britain observed yesterday, Labour's economic policies would prove suicidal for our economy.

32. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he will next visit the county palatine.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) some moments ago.

Mr. Marshall: When my right hon. Friend next visits the duchy, will he point out that under our NHS reforms a record number of patients are being treated there by a record number of doctors and nurses, and that waiting lists are falling? Will he also point out that the only threat to the progress being made in the duchy comes from those who propose the introduction of a national minimum wage, and the abolition of competitive tendering and charging in the NHS? Taken together, those measures would cost the NHS £1 billion.

Mr. Patten: I could not have put it better myself, so perhaps I should not try. I shall confine myself to mentioning that under the present Government NHS spending has increased as a proportion of gross domestic product. I hope that even at this late stage Labour will support the GPs' contract, GP fundholding and NHS trust status for hospitals, all of which are proving so successful.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Refreshment Facilities

39. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects results from the feasibility study on refreshment facilities for visitors to the House.

40. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what progress has been made to improve catering facilities for Members' parties visiting the Palace of Westminster.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The newly formed Catering Committee is expected early next month to consider two consultants' reports on the architectural feasibility and management implications of converting the premises of the former St. Stephen's tavern into a refreshment facility for groups of Members' visitors. I understand that the Committee will be asked to work for a decision by Easter.

Mr. Hain: As the Lord President will be aware, visitors to Wales are always given a warm welcome and a nice cup of tea, but coachloads of my constituents visiting the Houses of Parliament are cold-shouldered and cannot obtain refreshments anywhere.

I understand the right hon. Gentleman's response, but would it not be a far better idea to use Westminster Hall for the purpose, providing chairs and tables there? After all, until the last century Westminster Hall was used for royal banquets and coronation feasts; surely it would be possible for people to order a nice cup of tea there.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his first remark about visitors to Wales. Certainly when I went there recently I was given a very good reception, which pleased me very much.

The hon. Gentleman will probably know that the authorities who deal with Westminster Hall do not consider that the use that he has suggested for it would be appropriate; nor, I think, would the vast majority of hon. Members. The Catering Committee will be considering whether what used to be St. Stephen's tavern could help by providing facilities for visitors.

Mr. Jessel: Can my right hon. Friend improve the refreshments provided not only for visitors but for Opposition Members, who seem rather subdued and depressed today?

Mr. MacGregor: When my hon. Friend began his question, I intended to say that it was a matter for the Catering Committee, but I am no longer sure that it is. I well understand why Opposition Members are looking rather depressed today, but I do not think that it has anything to do with catering facilities in the House.

Mr. Grocott: Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that during the deliberations of the Select Committee on Broadcasting, Etc.—with all of whose arrangements we have been happy so far—parts of the Palace of Westminster were discovered that no one knew existed, including the area above Central Lobby? Is it not high time that a proper review was carried out of exacty what space exists throughout the Palace, so that we can use it well for the benefit of our constituents and for other purposes?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman and I visited the part of the Palace to which he has referred. I think he would agree that it is not a suitable location for the provision of refreshments for visitors. The right step is for the Select Committee on Catering to consider the proposals, as it will do shortly.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Will my right hon. Friend be sure to ask for a branch of the kiosk in any new catering facility for visitors, and will he make sure that it has House of Commons fudge and humbugs on sale? The main kiosk has had none of these since before Christmas.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend might like to put that point to the Select Committee on Catering.

Lockerbie

41. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will set up a Select Committee to consider the investigations into the Lockerbie air disaster.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no plans to do so. The Lockerbie air disaster is regularly discussed in the House

—including Government statements, when appropriate —and I recall that the hon. Member had the Adjournment debate on this very subject just last Monday.

Mr. Dalyell: What is a Member of Parliament to do when, having been lucky enough to be given an Adjournment debate by you, Mr. Speaker, and having given a copy of his entire speech to the Foreign Office at 9.45 in the morning, the Minister—in this case the Minister of State, the hon. and learned Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg)— makes no attempt whatever to answer the deeply serious issues that have been raised? Is it surprising that in respect of foreign affairs this is the most ill-informed House of Commons that I have known in my 30 years here? Or is it possible that the Government are contemplating a repetition of the 1986 strikes on civilian targets in Benghazi and Tripoli? If so, the House of Commons ought to discuss the matter.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's premise that the House is ill informed in respect of these matters. Indeed, there have been many Government statements. The hon. Gentleman will know that the generally accepted purpose of Select Committees is the monitoring of individual Departments. It would be possible for one of the existing Select Committees to consider the issue, if it so wished.

Back Benchers (Parliamentary Time)

42. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what representations he has received about the allocation of parliamentary time for private Members.

Mr. MacGregor: I have not received any representations about the allocation of parliamentary time for private Members. The general point is, of course, being considered by the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling).

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that, whatever changes are made to the sitting hours, it would be a retrograde step—a step detrimental to the rights of Back Benchers—to introduce legislation to reduce them? As it is, Back Benchers have precious little time and it should not be reduced further.

Mr. MacGregor: It is, of course, a matter for the Select Committee on Sittings of the House to make recommendations in the first place. Thereafter, it is for the House to decide upon those recommendations. The point that I made to the Committee is that if we wish to reduce the hours of the House or change the sitting times—that is still an open question—it is important that we consider how the time of the House is used at present and to make reductions pro rata. However, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the opportunities for Back Benchers to introduce Bills are very important, and I am sure that the Select Committee will keep that very much in mind.

Parliamentary Channel

43. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make arrangements for Members to receive output from the parliamentary channel introduced as from 13 January 1992.

Mr. MacGregor: As making the parliamentary channel available in Members' rooms would be tantamount to supplying a clean feed direct from the Chamber, it would be for the Select Committee on Broadcasting, Etc. in the first instance, to approve such a proposal. There are, however, technical problems which look like precluding the provision of this service for all Members before 1994. I hope to arrange for the Broadcasting Committee to consider the issue at an early date. Any eventual recommendation to proceed would be a matter for the House as a whole to decide.

Mr. Banks: Will the Lord President tell the House what the technical difficulties are? It seems absurd that, while extended coverage of our proceedings is now available, Members cannot have a sound and vision feed to their rooms. The idea that this Chamber is a place to which we all come to be influenced by the ebb and flow of debate and the oratory of Members is totally ridiculous. Why should we come to the Chamber to be bored rigid when we could be bored rigid in the comparative comfort of our own offices?

Mr. MacGregor: It would be technically possible now for some Members' offices to be given the feed. The real problem is that this building does not have the necessary cable ducts. Given the nature of the building, the provision of ducts is a very complex task. At the moment, consultants are looking into the matter in detail, and their report will be put before the Broadcasting Committee for its consideration. However, it seems likely from the preliminary indications that it would not be possible to complete the work until 1994.

Sir John Stokes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are possibly far too few people in the Chamber and, even more important, far too few in the Smoking Room, the most vital part of the House of Commons? If hon. Members are going to be glued to their television sets, as apparently some are at home, there will be even fewer of them about anyway.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is extremely important to bear in mind the key significance of the Chamber and the Smoking Room. We must take that into account. On the other hand, many hon. Members want such a facility directly available to them and we are examining that.

Question Time Rota

45. **Mr. Skinner** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he has any plans to change the rota of departmental and Prime Minister's questions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have no immediate plans for any significant changes in the question rota at this stage in the Parliament.

Mr. Skinner: Is it not a tidy state of affairs when the best that the 370-odd Tory Members can deliver in this place every Tuesday and Thursday and at other Question Times is a tirade of abuse about what Labour would do? Why do they not have the guts to tackle their own Government about cuts in services? Then there was that bleating Prime Minister on "Desert Island Discs" saying

that he would love to get away from Question Time on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If he is that much of a wimp, why does he not get out of the road and let us take over?

Mr. MacGregor: I thought that the hon. Gentleman had a sense of humour, but it appears not. With regard to answers in the House, over the whole range of government, we have indicated the considerable improvements including a considerable increase in expenditure on our priority areas in the public services. It is legitimate to spend some time—I well understand why the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is so sensitive about this—examining the tax and expenditure proposals of the Labour party. There is no doubt that that has been happening in the country at large and that they have now been rumbled. That is why the hon. Gentleman is so concerned.

Mr. Burns: The Opposition may not like it, but does my right hon. Friend believe that there is a case for allowing a small part of parliamentary time for the Leader of the Opposition to be questioned? He always puts his foot in it and tends to cause more confusion when he opens his mouth than when he keeps it shut.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that it is necessary to provide any more parliamentary time for that.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This concerns your responsibility for the accuracy of the parliamentary record. In the important debate on poverty last Thursday, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), at col. 514 of *Hansard*, suggested that extra national insurance payments would be payable under Labour by some people earning less than £21,000 a year. However, over the weekend, the deputy Leader of the Opposition contradicted that. Would it be possible for *Hansard* to be corrected——

Mr. Speaker: Order. With the best will in the world, I am not responsible for what was said over the weekend or for what may to be a contradiction. That is not a matter of order in the Chamber.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Today is a rare opportunity for Ulster Members to have parliamentary time. They would be very unhappy if that time was taken from them by points of order of this kind.

Mr. Martin: Perhaps the *Hansard* report can be corrected or the Opposition spokesman can come to the House and correct his party's blunders.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): On a point of order arising from questions today and statements in the press yesterday, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that Ministers are intent on a campaign of vilification and attack on Mr. Bruce Millan, the European Commissioner responsible for regional development. Leading that charge has been the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—that elegant nonentity whose only claim to fame was that he helped rid the nation of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). So he has some track record.

Mr. Speaker: I know, but what is the point of order for me?

Mr. Hogg: My point of order is that, if the Government are having a difference with someone as important as a European Commissioner over such a substantial sum of European and public money, and with the charges that the British Treasury is laundering that money, surely a Minister should have been at the Dispatch Box today to make a statement. Why was there no statement?

Mr. Speaker: I do not know, but the issue arose several times at Question Time. The right hon. Bruce Millan is no longer a Member of this House and therefore is not protected by privilege here.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your advice on a very serious matter. I should like your guidance on what steps can be taken to curb a continuing abuse of the facilities of this House at serious unauthorised cost to taxpayers.

Last week, my attention was drawn to a document headed "Oldham, Central and Royton Labour Party" about the "Royal Oldham Hospital Opt-out", and bearing the name of Mr Bryan Davies, a former Member of this House who still works in the precincts of the House and who is the prospective parliamentary condidate for Oldham, Central and Royton. There are to be 4,000 copies of that document, and it is purported to be printed and published by Cath Ball at 110 Union street, Oldham.

The document is actually being printed at the taxpayers' expense on the two photocopiers next to my desk in the House of Commons. Both photocopiers have been set for multiple copies, and both have run out of paper. That is clearly an unauthorised and flagrant abuse of the facilities of this House and an unauthorised use of taxpayers' money. Should you not summon Mr. Davies to the Bar of the House—*[Interruption.]* Should not his candidature be declared invalid?

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Member should do—*[Interruption.]* Order, please. What the hon. Member should do is to draw the matter to the attention of the Serjeant at Arms, and it will be investigated further.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There is no "further" to it at all: I have dealt with it.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): With respect——

Mr. Speaker: With respect—no.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Denis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]* Now hold on a bit.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know whether I can do that, but I must hear it first.

Mr. Skinner: If we are going to start looking into where money has gone, let us examine how it was that the right hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) had a job for two months and a £100,000 pay-off and a Mercedes for a penny. There is summat wrong in that.

Mr. Speaker: This is the trouble with points of order of this kind. *[Interruption.]* They tend to be contagious. I repeat that this is a rare opportunity for Ulster Members, and I ask hon. Members to raise points of order with which I can deal—that is to say, within my responsibilities.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham). It does seem——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have already given my ruling on that and said exactly what the hon. Member should do about it.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance on a matter that may arise in future. You will know that the—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Something that may arise in future is not a matter for me now.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could I be of some assistance? Incidents like this happen almost every day, usually—*[Interruption.]*—raised by Tory hon. Members, and they are usually dealt with through the usual channels, the Government deputy Chief Whip, myself and the Serjeant at Arms. If the Government want to fetch every one of those issues to the

[Mr. Don Dixon]

Floor of the House, I am quite prepared to do exactly the same, and every day we shall have points of order that go on for half an hour—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. If there is not some self-discipline, that is exactly what happens. *[Interruption.]* Points of order can come from both sides of the House. I must say to Conservative Members who are raising points of order of this kind that it is a dangerous game.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: I have raised with you, Mr. Speaker, on several occasions matters similar to that which was brought to your attention by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham).

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have dealt with that.

Mr. Hughes: I am raising it——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dickens: On a different matter, Mr. Speaker. Oldham has been mentioned, and as five wards of my constituency fall within the borough of Oldham, this matter very much concerns me. We are talking not about election expenses, but about theft from the House of Commons—*[Interruption.]*—because there is no doubt that it is a theft of material——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I told the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who first raised this matter, that he should draw it to the attention of the Serjeant at Arms, when appropriate action would be taken.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Finally—Mr. Janman.

Mr. Janman: As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Opposition Members continually tell the House that their industrial and tax policies have the support of British industry. Is it in order for them to continue clearly to deceive the House, when the chairman of Ford of Britain has said that their policies amount to economic suicide?

Mr. Speaker: That is way outside any point of order for me and is an absolute abuse of the system. Let us get on with the Irish debate. I call Mr. Needham.

Electricity (Northern Ireland)

[Relevant documents: First report of the Energy Committee, HC 25 of Session 1991-92, on privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity, and the Government's observations, HC 178 of Session 1991-92.]

3.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I beg to move,

That the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

I understand that it will be convenient for the House also to discuss the second motion:

That the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

I am sure that all hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies will welcome the opportunity to debate the orders. The Government wish to present our proposals for legislation that will enable the electricity industry in Northern Ireland to be privatised.

The House has already had considerable opportunity to discuss our proposals. We had three sessions on this in the Northern Ireland Committee in June last year, when we had a thorough debate. Indeed, it appears that that debate was so thorough that many Northern Ireland Members no longer wish to debate the matter or to listen to my opening comments. A variety of opinions was expressed in Committee, and at the end of our debates some of the opinions were slightly different from those held at the start of our Committee proceedings.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I should point out in all fairness that quite a few Northern Ireland Members are engaged in talks with the Secretary of State on the future government of Northern Ireland and therefore cannot be present at the moment.

Mr. Needham: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's point, but all three members of the Democratic Unionist party are surely not required to attend those talks. I am disappointed that none of those hon. Members is in his place, because I had been looking forward to their contributions and should have liked to address the odd remark to them, but I shall do that in any event.

The Select Committee on Energy has also examined the proposals in considerable depth, and the Government welcome its report. In particular, I welcome the Committee's conclusion that there are admirable features in our privatisation proposals. I agree with the Committee about the welcome developments that are in prospect, such as the electricity interconnector and the possibility of a gas pipeline. We have made some proposals to Commissioner Millan for a contribution from the European Economic Community of about 35 per cent. of the cost of the pipeline and 50 per cent. of the interconnector. I am sure that that former right hon. Member of this House could do a lot to help Northern Ireland by giving us a favourable response in the very near future, as I believe he will.

I part company with the Committee in a small way on its comment that those developments would have come about irrespective of our privatisation proposals. According to paragraph 25 of its report, the Committee did not feel that the gas pipeline was dependent on the

form of privatisation that we have proposed. I shall return to that point later, but I want to put down a clear marker now. Potential purchasers——

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Although the Select Committee on Energy did indeed say that some of the advantages that would flow from the privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland were not entirely dependent on privatisation for their achievement, we accepted that privatisation would accelerate that achievement, and in that sense, we certainly welcome the privatisation.

Mr. Needham: I am grateful for the comments of my hon. Friend, who is the distinguished Chairman of the Committee. Nevertheless, I do not believe for one moment —I made this point on enough occasions to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs)—that, if we had not given potential investors the opportunity to buy a power station that could be converted to gas, there would have been much hope of bringing a gas pipeline to Northern Ireland. I am convinced that it was only our privatisation proposals which allowed us to bring gas as a real possibility—now a probability, and almost certainly a certainty—to Northern Ireland. Without those proposals, I am sure that the gas pipeline would never even have got out of the locker.

If we had not given investors the chance to bid for Ballylumford and taken steps towards privatisation, that vital option would not have been made available to us. I hasten to add that I would not lightly disagree with the findings of the Committee, but I am firmly of the view that the developments to which I shall later refer—interconnection, increased fuel diversity, competition within the system, downward pressure on cost, environmental benefits and energy efficiency—are all a direct result of our proposals to restructure the electricity industry and change the conditions under which it operates.

There is a consistent logic to our position. We are privatising the industry for two reasons. First, the existing position is unsatisfactory and should be changed. Secondly, privatisation can deliver a significant range of benefits to Northern Ireland consumers. That will be a recurring theme of my speech.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not ironic that the Government are introducing the Bill at a time when virtually all the political parties—parties which rarely find common ground, as we have tragically and sadly witnessed over the years—see eye to eye in opposing the scheme? When so many different strands of opinion oppose privatisation—a view that will undoubtedly be expressed today—is it not stupid for the Government to introduce the Bill in their dying days?

Mr. Needham: It is an order, not a Bill. The Government have proposed to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity for a considerable time. If the hon. Gentleman had participated in our debates in Committee, he would have heard a wide range of differing views and opinions expressed by the various parties in Northern Ireland—and, to some extent, by people within the same party. I shall refer to the positions within the parties as I proceed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Following the remarks of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that most people want the benefits that will come from privatisation freeing the constraints placed on the industry? What effect will the measure have on rural electrification, and in particular the mains system for Rathlin?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend was one of the major promoters of the scheme to bring electricity to Rathlin. As he will know, the scheme is in the process of being introduced. He knows Northern Ireland Electricity as well as I do. He will recall that dealing with NIE and trying to bring electricity to Rathlin was not one of the easiest tasks that he or I had to undertake. When we consider the regulation that will be imposed and the rights of consumers in Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend will find that consumers will be much better protected and safeguarded under privatisation than if they had been left to continue with a publicly owned monopoly which too often had a life of its own and was not subject to the outside pressures that consumers have a right to bring to bear.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): The debates in Committee have been mentioned. Although hon. Members representing Ulster voiced different shades of opinion, they reached a common conclusion with the Liberal Democrat and Labour hon. Members in the Committee that they were opposed to the order. The party of the hon. Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams)—although he has not taken his seat—was also in opposition. The only party in Northern Ireland which supports privatisation is the small Conservative party. As there is such widespread unity, I reiterate the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) —surely in that case Northern Ireland's viewpoint should be taken into account, and the order should be kicked into touch.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman has listened to the debate and knows perfectly well that a vast variety of views exist within the Northern Ireland parties. The Labour party's proposal, which I shall come to later, is to do nowt. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said that, if it was all right, we should leave it alone. The hon. Member for Antrim, East was in favour of the introduction of gas, but could not explain how on earth to get it without privatisation.

The view of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) was that many things should be left as they are, but he accepted that savings could be made and changes ought to be made, although he did not explain how. There is plenty of time for hon. Members to make speeches, and if I can develop my argument a little en route, I shall be happy to do so.

Mr. John D. Taylor: I am sure that the Under-Secretary will agree that there is usually more agreement between political parties within Northern Ireland than between the Labour and Conservative parties in England, so I do not understand the logic of the statement by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes).

To get back to the subject of the gas pipeline—I suspect that the Minister has left it and will not return to it——

Mr. Needham: I shall return to it.

Mr. Taylor: In that case, could the Minister tell us whether it has already been agreed which firm will provide

[Mr. Taylor]

the gas pipeline? Will it be the gas board in the Republic of Ireland? Has a proper analysis been made of its implications for the fishing industry in the Irish sea?

Mr. Needham: No, it will not be the gas board in the Republic of Ireland, and I suspect that I shall be returning to the subject of gas all afternoon and most of the evening.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): The Minister is right to say that there are different reasons and attitudes in the different parties in the north of Ireland on this issue. Some arguments are ideological, some are about practicalities and others are about economy. I am sorry to interrupt the Minister at this point, but he should clarify one great worry—we are concerned about exchanging a public for a private monopoly. That is the underlying fear of all of us in the north of Ireland. He must argue convincingly for that during the debate.

Mr. Needham: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to proceed, I shall cogently answer that question, because it is the key to our decision.

First, even critics of privatisation have the greatest difficulty in defending the existing position. How does one continue to justify the Northern Ireland electricity system's over-dependence on a single fuel? Seventy per cent. of our capacity is still oil-burning. Why does the system in Northern Ireland remain isolated with no connection to any other system, with all the technical and economic disadvantages which that entails and which the hon. Member for Antrim, East has referred to on several occasions?

Given its captive market, why does NIE have such a poor track record in improving efficiency, productivity and profits? Why has it been necessary to have endless debates about developing phase 2 of Kilroot as an oil or coal-burning plant, which is the expensive and the dirty option? Why was the lignite option given such short shrift by NIE when it was raised a few years ago? Hon. Members from the Democratic Unionist party are constantly asking me that question. Why has it taken so long to bring interconnection back on to the agenda?

The answer is simple. To operate an undertaking in public ownership locks in management to a mindset that is "steady as she goes". That system is flawed. I do not believe that, in those circumstances, management can recognise new opportunity when it occurs—and, my goodness, there is new opportunity around. Only the prospect of competition can alter that outlook. The system of publicly owned monopoly is flawed. It cannot be expected to deliver the kind of service that Northern Ireland consumers have a right to expect.

It was repeatedly said, particularly in Committee, that there was nothing seriously wrong with NIE; to quote again the hon. Member for Antrim, North: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." There seemed to be an unspoken acceptance by hon. Members that the present system was less than satisfactory, but that we must avoid at any cost anything as dangerous and revolutionary as suggesting a change. That attitude is incomprehensible in hon. Members who say that they wish to represent the interests of the consumers in their constituency. If we all shared that attitude, we would undoubtedly still travel in steam trains, and passengers would be covered in soot.

Of course we should not endlessly meddle and interfere with the electricity industry in Northern Ireland. That would serve no useful purpose. Equally, if we see that the electricity industry is not performing to maximum efficiency and should be doing better—there is general agreement on that—surely we have an obligation to do something about it. That applies as much to hon. Members opposite, to whose arguments for improving the system under their regime I look forward, as to other hon. Members with their proposals about what should be done about it.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): We are all interested to hear the Minister's view on NIE. Could he remind the House which Minister exercises overall responsibility for NIE, and why that Minister has shown such a lack of activity in the past few years?

Mr. Needham: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. I am in charge of NIE, and whatever matters I can be criticised for, showing a lack of activity is not one.

Let us look at what has happened to other utilities in Great Britain that were fixed by the Government before they broke down. British Telecom prices are down by 27 per cent. in real terms, 96 per cent. of all call boxes are in working order at any given time, and waiting lists for connections are virtually eliminated. Gas has seen domestic prices fall by 12 per cent., and disconnections are at their lowest recorded level. The RPI minus X factor is now RPI minus 5. The water companies are investing some £28 billion between now and the end of this century. The fact that Treasury rules restricted past investment makes it all the more necessary now for the privatised companies to get on with it.

In Northern Ireland itself, Shorts and Harland and Wolff have demonstrated an ability to hold their position even in recessionary times. Employment levels at Shorts are higher now than when the company was privatised. Recently, Harland and Wolff has attracted the largest orders in Europe.

How many Northern Ireland Members who agreed with Labour Members and opposed the privatisation of Shorts and of Harland and Wolff would do so now? Would the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) now oppose the purchase of Shorts by Bombardier? We cannot ask him, because he is not here, but it is an important question, to which his constituents have a right to know his answer. He opposed the privatisations, yet they are now the two greatest flag carriers in the Northern Ireland economy. If he were here to answer the question, I suspect that he would be in considerable difficulty if he tried to say that he continued to oppose those privatisations.

I want to see the right kind of deal for electricity consumers in Northern Ireland. I want greater investment and efficiency and to see prices stabilised in a tougher, more competitive electricity industry. The arrival of the single market in 1992 means that, as never before, our costs must be in line with those in the rest of Europe. A revitalised electricity industry is crucial to the supply of power to our factories and businesses at the cheapest possible price.

I wish to tell the House not what hon. Members have said about our proposals, but what industry and commerce in Northern Ireland have said. I hope that Opposition Members will give credence to the views of

industry and commerce in Northern Ireland, if they hope to attract future investment and employment to the Province.

The Confederation of British Industry in Northern Ireland has stated:

"CBI (NI) welcomes Government's decision to privatise NIE. Moving NIE into the private sector will bring benefits in terms of efficiency, commercial drive, attitudes and investment decisions free from Treasury interference."

The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce has stated that it

"supports the privatisation of NIE because it is convinced that the introduction of private sector business disciplines will ultimately produce a more efficient industry."

The Action Group on Northern Ireland Electricity Prices states:

"The group supports the Government's plans for privatisation . . . and in particular the link to Scotland."

That is the authentic voice of industry and commerce in Northern Ireland, and surely Opposition Members should listen to it.

Mr. Mallon: The Minister is attempting to paint a comprehensive picture of what those in industry and commerce in Northern Ireland say about the privatisation, but what about the views of the Northern Ireland Economic Council? First, it has said that the benefits to the consumer are far from obvious. Secondly, it has expressed fears about changing a public sector monopoly into a private sector monopoly, and expressed concern about consumer protection. If the Minister wishes to quote sources, he should be comprehensive so why does he not quote the views of the Northern Ireland Economic Council as well?

Mr. Needham: I am happy to acknowledge the views of the Northern Ireland Economic Council, and the questions that it had at the time of its submission need to be dealt with. I have already said that I shall answer the three particular issues that it raised. I cannot say that I believe that that council necessarily represents the views of industry and commerce.

On political opinion, the submission of the Ulster Unionist party shows, I am pleased to say, movement towards reality. However, it is alone on that. First, it now believes that competition is possible. I was delighted that the hon. Member for Antrim, East told the Select Committee on Energy that, with the introduction of gas and interconnection, competition was becoming possible. Secondly, the Ulster Unionist party felt that supplies of natural gas should be obtained for Northern Ireland. I hope and believe that we shall be able to meet that objective. Thirdly, it suggested that interconnection with Scotland was a good idea. I am in complete agreement with that. Finally, it suggested that interconnection with the Republic of Ireland ought to be re-established. The hon. Member for Antrim, East said that we had lost millions of pounds as a result of the failure to re-establish that interconnnection. I could not agree more.

Reading the submission of the Ulster Unionist party brought me back to a comment made by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, during the first sitting of the Northern Ireland Committee on 13 June. I asked him if he would be prepared to support the Government's privatisation proposals, and he said:

"I should be happy to do so, provided that the general public can apply for shares."—[*Official Report, Northern Ireland Committee*, 13 June 1991; c. 5.]

After reading the submission of the Ulster Unionist party, I am delighted to tell the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends that I can add to their happiness. I have served a place for him at the head of the queue to buy shares in the privatised NIE. I hope that all hon. Members representing Northern Ireland will take the opportunity to invest in the economic future of the Province. I know that some have already taken the plunge and purchased shares in privatised utilities, and I trust that they will encourage their colleagues to do likewise.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Is the Minister telling the House and the people of Northern Ireland that they will have an opportunity to buy shares in the generating companies that he proposes for Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well how Northern Ireland Electricity privatisation is taking place. For the first time in any privatisation proposal, the people of Northern Ireland will be able to buy shares in the transmission, distribution and supply business.

May I bring the House up to date with recent developments?

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Needham: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has a speech to make. I should like to progress a little before giving way to him.

In July last year, we sought expressions of interest for the power stations. Bids were received in November, and those have been the subject of scrutiny and discussion. No final decisions have yet been taken, but we have identified the parties whose bids best meet our objectives. Those are a consortium of an American company, AES, and a Belgian concern, Tractebel, which wish to purchase the stations at Belfast West and Kilroot; British Gas, which is interested in purchasing Ballylumford; and a management-employee buy-out for Coolkeeragh.

We did not begin the sales process with a policy decision that only one of the smaller stations would be sold to a MEBO, but in view of our objectives, the bids for the other stations—particularly the prospect of gas for Ballylumford—simply could not be ignored.

We are still engaged in negotiations with those parties and others, so the House will understand that I cannot give further details today. We hope to be able to sign contracts soon after Parliament has approved the legislation, and to get all the usual merger clearances under European and domestic law. We need to sign those contracts as quickly as possible, so that the new owners can become fully familiar with the day-to-day running arrangements, and to prepare for the operating changes that will be necessary when the power purchase agreements come into effect.

I am especially pleased about the prospect of obtaining a gas supply for the conversion of Ballylumford, particularly as it would open up real prospects for developing the downstream market. The hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said that such a prospect was "as dead as a dodo". In my judgment, the only thing that is as dead as a dodo is the hon. Gentleman's policy on Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. McGrady: Will the Minister quote the source from which he took that quotation?

Mr. Needham: I took it from the Select Committee *Hansard*, which I read just before I came here this afternoon.

The attractions of gas for Ballylumford are obvious. It would not only provide a welcome diversity of fuel generation, lessening the industry's dependence on oil, but also enable easier compliance with EC emissions limits and minimise the expense of fitting cleaning equipment and associated waste disposal problems. The hon. Member for South Down, who has done so much since he has been a Member of Parliament and previously to stress the need for clean fuel and a greener environment, will also welcome the fact that we have raised gas from the dead and are now in the process of bringing its use to reality.

Gas also offers the prospect of modern, gas-fired combined cycle gas turbine plant competing with coal, oil and lignite-fired plant. Hon. Members are aware of the efficiency, cleanliness and capital cost benefits of CCGTs. It has been estimated that it would cost in excess of £300 million to build Kilroot 2 with flue gas desulphurisation fitted. I hope that no one, even the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), would go along with the view of Northern Ireland Electricity that we should build Kilroot 2 without FGD.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Disgraceful.

Mr. Needham: As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) will remember, that was the proposal by Northern Ireland Electricity. No doubt, had we not been in power the plan would have been accepted, as were all the proposals of Northern Ireland Electricity by our predecessor.

Mr. Bottomley: Normally, discussions between Ministers are kept private. When I was an Environment Minister, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, as an Industry Minister, stood up against the proposal to look for a clever way of getting round the European environment plans. I appreciated the way he stood up steadfastly for what was right, rather than what was convenient to NIE.

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who I am sure will confirm that some Opposition Members also agreed with us. If we want to look at division in Northern Ireland, that is not a bad place to start. Building a CCGT plant would cost almost half the cost of building Kilroot 2. Therefore, not only is CCGT cleaner; it is much less expensive.

The potential for developing the downstream market exists. At present, for its energy requirements, excluding transport, about 60 per cent. of the domestic sector in Northern Ireland relies on solid fuel and about half the industrial sector relies on oil, as does two thirds of the commercial sector. In each of the three sectors, there is only a 3 per cent. reliance on gas. Therefore, we rely almost entirely on oil and coal. Penetration of the market by a gas supplier is commercially attractive, and the possibility of industry using gas to develop combined heat and power is only one prospect that is opened up in addition to all the alternatives already mentioned.

All of us know of the environmental effects of burning oil and coal on a large scale. One has only to fly over Belfast on a clear winter's day when there are thousands of chimneys discharging smoke fumes to see that it is not attractive or healthy. I do not believe that smokeless fuel is the answer. How can we expect people to burn it in significant enough quantities when it remains so much more expensive than coal? Even leaving aside cost, there are harmful emissions from smokeless fuel, which is another reason why gas is such an attractive proposition.

Technically, developing the downstream market is feasible. We have not yet looked at all the details, but I understand that the refurbishment of the old Belfast gas system, which served the most densely populated districts of South Antrim and North Down, is practicable. It goes almost without saying that such developments will have the benefit of employing people to bring gas to the downstream market.

The energy efficiency section of the Government's proposals were rightly welcomed by the Select Committee on Energy. I think we all recognise the essential message that energy efficiency not only reduces costs but contributes to a cleaner environment. Our proposals will be particularly effective. The regulatory regime will require TDS to purchase energy as cheaply as possible. It will remove any incentive that TDS might have to increase its sales by promoting the wasteful use of electricity. It will oblige TDS to take account of least-cost planning.

Those are not just vague promises—TDS will have to deliver. One of its licence conditions will oblige it to produce a code of practice showing how it proposes to encourage the efficient use of electricity by its customers, and that will have to be approved by the regulator. Another licence condition will require TDS to satisfy the regulator that it is not ordering new generation plant before it has considered a full range of alternative options —including least-cost planning. Therefore, it must show the consumer and the regulator in Northern Ireland that, before a new plant is built and comes on stream, more cannot be taken out of existing plant, and more cannot be done through reducing energy usage.

This means that, when demand is rising, TDS would have to consider carefully whether it was more economical to commission new generating capacity, which would evidently cost more to purchase than energy from old, fully depreciated plant, or whether there were ways of limiting demand so that the need for new capacity could be deferred for a time. Such measures, known as demand side control, are a feature of electricity undertakings which we have taken from the United States.

This is an extremely important provision, and its inclusion in the TDS licence is probably unique on this side of the Atlantic. It is evidence of the Government's determination to create a system in which efficiencies can be maximised in the interests of consumers, and green interests can be promoted at the same time. I am sure that it will command the support of hon. Members throughout the House.

This fully accords with the duty placed on the Department of Economic Development and the regulator by this order to carry out their functions in a way that takes into account the environmental effects of generation, transmission and supply.

Another closely related area is the development of a non-fossil fuel regime for Northern Ireland. I am pleased to announce that a joint study will be carried out by my Department, Northern Ireland Electricity and the Department of Energy to examine the technical and economic factors affecting the deployment of reusable energy resources in Northern Ireland. The first phase of the study will review the current status of the various

renewable technologies and identify those with the best prospects for development. A report on this initial phase will be available in April.

The second phase will give a more detailed assessment of the resources which have the best prospects for commercial development, and when the results of the study are available, I will announce details of the NFFO arrangements that we intend to make for Northern Ireland.

The first competition for renewable supplies will take place later this year. The draft order is the legislative basis for the Government's privatisation proposals. It is a long and complicated document, so I hope that the House will bear with me if I briefly outline what it does.

First, the order creates the office of regulator for Northern Ireland. It is important that a strong, independent, central authority should exist to ensure that the new industry operates in the best interests of the consumer and the Northern Ireland economy. The order places on the regulator and the DED duties to carry out their functions in a way that promotes an efficient and effective industry and protects the interests of electricity consumers. It also gives the regulator the means to direct the industry through the generation, transmission and supply licences and the conditions contained in them.

This represents a wide-ranging and extremely flexible means of regulating the industry, and copies of the first draft of the Northern Ireland licence have been placed in the Library.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): On the question of the regulator, is the Minister aware that, in my constituency, one of the largest users of electricity, which consumes about 11 million units a year, has to pay 4·64p per unit, compared with an average 3·5p per unit in Great Britain? Will the regulator take into consideration such comparative prices for electricity between Northern Ireland and Great Britain?

Mr. Needham: Yes, he will. One of the jobs will be to examine how best to help large users, for the reasons that I explained earlier. The 30 per cent. gap exists, and one of the reasons for our privatisation proposal is the desire to provide more flexibility in the system so as to allow our bigger users to remain competitive and to be able to attract more inward investment to the Province.

Mr. Beggs: It has been suggested that we have already lost new investment in continuous process industries in Northern Ireland because of the high cost of electricity. Is that fact or allegation?

Mr. Needham: I do not know where the right hon. Gentleman heard that suggestion. It is certainly true that companies with energy-intensive proposals have gone elsewhere, and one can only surmise that that has been partly due to the high cost of supplying electricity in Northern Ireland.

The order specifies terms, conditions and standards for the supply of electricity to customers. This is a considerable advance on the 1972 electricity order, which took comparatively little account of the requirements of consumers, or the standards of service that they were entitled to expect.

The order establishes a new consumer body dedicated to the interests of electricity consumers. The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland has welcomed the order's safeguard and protections.

Finally, the provisions of part III provide for the transfer of NIE's assets, rights and liabilities to Government-owned successor companies, and for those companies to be transferred to the private sector. The order is similar to the Electricity Act 1989, but it is not identical. The legal and contractual framework that the order makes possible is specially tailored to the requirements of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland, not least in its provisions to ensure that electrical power is not wasted.

Because of the small size of the Northern Ireland system and the constraints of system stability, there are limits on the extent to which we can promote competition while ensuring that it is beneficial to the consumer and in the long-term interests of the industry itself. We propose to encourage competition in a number of ways, both in generation and on the supply side.

In generation competition will most easily arise when TDS invites tenders for new capacity. The first such competition will take place later this year. At that stage, I expect to see a very clear demonstration of the benefits which flow from the decision to split generation from the TDS side of the industry.

For the first time, the playing field will be level. That means that, instead of automatically proceeding to develop Kilroot phase 2, which is what we would have been told was the only option, TDS will be able to choose the most appropriate and cost-effective option. At the end of the day, that might prove to be Kilroot 2, but if that is the case, it will be because the arguments for phase 2 have been won in the face of proposals for lignite, new coal-fired plant, CCGT plant or whatever other options have been placed on the table.

It will also be possible to have competition in running the generating stations. Within technical constraints, a generator's place in the merit order will be determined by how cheaply he can produce energy. If he is able to buy fuel in the market at a reduced cost, he will be able to offer to generate at a lower price than he is contracted for in his power purchasing agreement. He can then be given a higher place in the merit order, or be asked to run for a longer period. He will then be competing directly with the other generators. The pressure will always be to try to be able to buy fuel at the cheapest possible price.

The interconnector with Scotland will give access to electricity at prices relating to those of England and Wales pool. Interconnection with the Republic of Ireland would create the possibility of two-way trade between the systems. Those linkages will give TDS a strong incentive to keep prices down.

There are also the Government's proposals for supply competition, which were set out in my written answer of 18 December. If Opposition Members consider our proposals objectively, they will acknowledge that competition is the key to keeping prices down, and that our proposals give ample scope for developing it.

Costs will also be subjected to downward pressure by virtue of price regulation. There will be a cap on both the transmission and distribution elements of TDS's total revenue, which will be adjusted yearly. This will allow TDS to make a reasonable profit, but it will not allow profits to be boosted simply by promoting sales of more electricity.

[Mr. Needham]

Furthermore, an RPI minus X formula will apply to both the supply business and the transmission and distribution business, to give TDS the incentive to maximise its efficiency and ensure the lowest prices.

Mr. McGrady: Will the Minister explain how, under the existing regulatory machinery, substantial increases in electricity prices were permitted in the past three years? Those were well beyond the increase in the cost of the fuel needed to generate that electricity. Was that a fattening of the calf for this exercise?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows that it was not a question of fattening the calf. For many years, Northern Ireland Electricity did not make profits. It had very large Government subventions for many years. When we considered what NEI should charge, we looked at what prices were required to give NEI a reasonable return on its depreciating capital. That is the reason for the price rises, but they are not out of line with what has happened elsewhere. Regulation, competition and the caps that we are introducing mean that, for the first time, we can see transparently what the position is and how prices can be kept as low as possible.

I accept that energy prices in Northern Ireland are always liable to be higher than in Great Britain. That is a fact of geography, the absence of local fuel sources—until lignite is developed—the limited scale of operations and the need to supply and look after the rural community. However, the mechanisms that I have described should ensure that there will be no increases in electricity prices, in real terms, as a result of privatisation.

In introducing the draft order, I have tried to give the House some idea of our most important proposals and the background to them. I have tried to show that we are not handing down the Great Britain modeal for privatisation and imposing it on Northern Ireland but that we have tried to devise a system—and have done so—which is right for the needs of Northern Ireland. I hope to see evidence during the debate that Opposition Members approach the Government's proposals in the same light, by telling us what they would do. I hope also that the views of certain hon. Members have developed since our debates in the Northern Ireland Committee last summer.

In that spirit, I am confident that I can look forward to hearing new and exciting explanations from the hon. Member for Antrim, East as to why the gas that he advocates should be brought in would be good for Northern Ireland, whereas the gas that I am arranging to bring in would somehow be bad for Northern Ireland.

I am quite sure that the hon. Member for Antrim, North will wish to cast aside his native caution and reticence and confess that at last he sees some merit in our proposals. He will forgive me if I say that, in debates on this subject, he has shown a conservative approach to electricity in Northern Ireland. It reminds me of the sentiments voiced by the eminent figure who was the Member of the Northern Ireland Parliament for the constituency of Down in the 1920s and 1930s. He had a vision of the countryside without electricity, or any such tiresome modern conveniences. He referred to

"a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the rompings of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, and the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age."

The name of that visionary figure—I find it interesting that the hon. Member for Antrim, North should draw his political philosophy from the same wellspring—was, as he recalled, Eamon de Valera.

This order, and the proposals that flow from it, represent a tremendous opportunity to make changes which, in my judgment and that of the Government, will benefit everyone, from the captains of industry to old-age pensioners, irrespective of their religion or their political aspirations. This is a rare opportunity. I hope that the coming debate will be worthy of the importance of the occasion. I commend the draft electricity order and the consequential amendment order, which accompanies it, to the House.

4.28 pm

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I thank the Minister for taking us so carefully through the order. He did so in his usual charming and eloquent manner. I became a little concerned at the beginning of his speech when he tried to attack both hon. Members who are present in the Chamber and those who are absent. If the intention was to try to stimulate the debate, I am sure that he succeeded. However, I am sure that he will share my view that, in debates on Northern Ireland, Members of Parliament from the Province rarely need external stimulation to take part.

Mr. Needham: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us where he thinks those Members of Parliament are now.

Mr. Marshall: I hesitate to hazard a guess.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Surely the point that the Minister should be making is that, as the order cannot be amended, there is little incentive for hon. Members to take part in the debate.

Mr. Marshall: Perhaps I could link those two points. I understand that certain hon. Members from the Province have been holding discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the future government of the Province and its relationship with the republic and the rest of the United Kingdom. Legislation such as this is ideally suited for debate in a devolved assembly in Belfast. I only hope that the talks will make sufficient progress for that to apply in future: when such legislation is discussed in the proper place, hon. Members—both here and in the Province—will be able to debate it fully and to make amendments if necessary.

I have complimented the Minister on his eloquence. I was a little concerned at first about his ebullience, but then I realised that both eloquence and ebullience were there for specific reasons. The Minister has taken the House through the contents of the order, but has sought to hide from us whether, in practice, the legislation will make the electricity industry work more efficiently in the Province and whether consumers will benefit from either a fall in prices or a less steep rise than those that they have experienced in the past.

The Minister has rehearsed at length the Government's ritualistic defence of privatisation. On this occasion, however, two themes from the usual song were missing: the concept of popular capitalism and that of wider share ownership. That is hardly surprising, given the strength of

political opinion in the Province, where the legislation is far from popular. Even those whose support for privatisation was cited by the Minister have reservations about the specific form of privatisation that is now being proposed.

The Minister mentioned the Action Group on Northern Ireland Electricity Prices. He should note that, although the group supports the proposals, the majority of its members would have preferred to retain Northern Ireland Electricity as an integrated generation and distribution company. He failed to mention that to the House. According to the report of the Select Committee on Energy, most members of the group would like NIE, as an integrated company, to continue to serve the Province as it has in the past—very well, in my view. It is most unjust of the Minister to denigrate NIE as he has this afternoon.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): The hon. Gentleman has referred to the report of the Select Committee on Energy, which gives the views of the action group. Perhaps it is not altogether surprising that the group expressed a wish for NIE to remain as a single entity. Does the hon. Gentleman recall, however, that the chairman and directors of the Central Electricity Generating Board wanted the whole electricity industry in the rest of the United Kingdom to be privatised in one go? It is now common wisdom on both sides of the House that there are not enough generators, although the industry has been divided into three parts.

Mr. Marshall: I am quoting from the report. It is a first-class report, which does much to undermine the Government's position on the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity. The Minister said specifically that this group supported the privatisation proposals. Lest the House has been misled, I should point out that the majority of the members of that group do not favour the form of privatisation being put forward by the Government. They would have preferred to retain Northern Ireland Electricity as an integrated generating and supply company.

Mr. Needham: If we had taken that route, how on earth would we have managed to attract gas into Northern Ireland?

Mr. Marshall: I will come to that point. The Minister is attaching too much credibility to his privatisation proposals, both from the point of view of the attraction of investment for the interconnector and from the point of view of the provision of a supply of natural gas to the Province. I shall deal with those points at the appropriate time.

As the Minister well knows, the sell-off of the generating sector certainly will not produce wider share ownership in the Province. There will be no public flotation of the companies, and they will be involved in a trade tender. I am pleased to hear that the Minister has nearly decided who will take over the four power stations in the Province. It will be cold comfort for the citizens of Northern Ireland that Belgians will be able to have shares in the power stations of the Province but that residents of Derry and Belfast will not be able to participate.

It will be interesting to know what provision, if any, the Government, when they float the supply company, will make to attract investment from the Province itself. Should privatisation of the supply company go ahead, it would surely be in the best interests of the Province if its people were given preferential treatment with regard to the purchase of shares.

There is a feeling in the Province that the Government are taking a gigantic and reckless gamble with the electricity supply industry there. My view is that they are doing so for dogmatic political reasons, and not for purely economic reasons. It is their intention to impose upon Northern Ireland a risky and unprecedented experiment that takes little account of the distinctive features of the electricity supply industry in the Province. In addition, they fail to take account of electricity privatisation in another part of the kingdom. I refer to the methods chosen for the privatisation of electricity in Scotland.

Despite what the Minister says, there is no evidence that competition in the generating sector would produce financial gains, particularly in the first years. Until the Minister made a statement on Friday—a statement that he seems to have forgotten—there was a fear that this could result in higher prices. I should like to refer to a point that the Minister made towards the end of his speech. I sought to intervene—not to make a political point but to seek information. In reply to the Select Committee's report, the Government say:

"Furthermore, the Government has decided that there will be no real increase in tariffs until at least 1996-97."

The House should note the words "the Government has decided". The Minister's speech today gave the impression that the matter was more conditional. Can he clarify the situation?

Mr. Needham: The statement, as it refers to 1996, stands exactly as the hon. Gentleman spelled it out. I am talking about the much longer-term effect of privatisation as it affects the existing generators and the new generators that will come along over the period of the power purchase agreements. The issue goes beyond 1996.

Mr. Marshall: I am even less clear now than I was before. The statement reads:

"The Government has decided that there will be no real increase in tariffs until at least 1996-97."

In other words, the Government are admitting that, in the interim period between 1992 and 1995-96, there will be no substantial financial gain from competition in the generating sector and, as a consequence, they must put the lid on prices at the outset.

There is no evidence—and the Minister produced no evidence—that introducing competition in the generating sector will produce big, real or meaningful gains. The Government's reply to the Select Committee report shows that that is the case in the four or five years following privatisation. I support the point made in the Select Committee report that many of the benefits attributed to privatisation, such as fuel diversification, are not dependent on the ownership of Northern Ireland Electricity.

The Opposition welcome other aspects of the order. We welcome the emphasis on energy efficiency and the power to require least-cost planning. I am delighted that the Province will be the first part of the United Kingdom to participate in that kind of energy saving. We also welcome the introduction of the non-fossil fuel obligation, something which all hon. Members will welcome. None of these issues are dependent on privatisation. They should have been pursued irrespective of who owns Northern Ireland Electricity.

[Mr. Marshall]

The Minister misleads the House if he suggests that those ideas have just been developed. Many of them are far more radical than anything we have in the remainder of the United Kingdom. However, it is wrong of the Minister to suggest that such discussions have taken place as a consequence of enthusiasm for privatisation. If that is the case, the Minister, who is the longest-serving Minister in the Northern Ireland Office——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Jeremy Hanley): The longest-ever serving Minister there.

Mr. Marshall: I am not sure whether that is to his benefit, but never mind. However, the Minister is certainly the longest-serving Minister in the Northern Ireland Office of this Government.

If the Minister is claiming that, throughout his years in office, none of those discussions in terms of energy conservation or alternative fuel sources has taken place, that shows that there has been a clear lack of political thought and will in the Government. I hesitate to criticise civil servants, because they do not have the right of reply in the House, but perhaps they have not provided him with up-to-date information and ideas which could have allowed decisions on those points to have been taken some time ago.

The Government have failed to take account of the distinctive features of Northern Ireland Electricity. We all know that it is small and overdependent on oil; that it is isolated from other electricity supply industries; that its customers are dispersed and that its prices are historically high.

We share the objective of removing the isolation from other systems. Access should be available to alternative fuels, particularly natural gas. However, we fundamentally disagree with the Minister that those objectives can be obtained only through privatisation. We believe that the interconnector and natural gas could and should be introduced even if Northern Ireland Electricity were not privatised.

I remind the Minister that one of the Government's main objectives, as outlined in the White Paper, is to

"introduce, wherever possible, forms of competition which will result in the lowest possible prices for consumers."

The Minister has done nothing to dispel our doubts. We believe that the Government's privatisation proposals will fail to meet that objective, as the competition proposed in the generation sector is unlikely to lead to reduced costs, particularly in the short term. Indeed, I believe that it is unlikely to do that in the long term. The Government's statement in reply to the Select Committee's report shows that they accept that argument specifically for the period to 1996.

The Government's proposals as outlined in the order and by the Minister today envisage three independent competing generating companies operating the four power stations in Northern Ireland. They also propose a monopoly transmission and distribution system owned by Northern Ireland Electricity (Transmission, Distribution and Supply) and a strong regulatory system.

The Minister may be pleased to hear that the Government are correct in their general assumption that financial benefits are most likely to accrue through competition in the generating sector. However, the Minister signally failed to answer the crucial question whether that will apply in the specific case of Northern Ireland. Our view, which was shared by some members of the Select Committee, is that the benefits must clearly outweigh the costs of competition. Clearly costs will arise from competition.

There will be a loss as a result of the breakdown of the integrated generating sector. There will be diseconomies of scale and less effective co-ordination. There will also be additional costs arising from the administration of the contract and regulatory systems. We believe that the changes arising from competition in the generating sector will not be sufficient to outweigh those costs of competition.

The Minister was a little unfair to the House when he referred to the existing power stations. The nature of the four power stations in the Province precludes any short-term financial advantage. As the Select Committee pointed out, the three companies operating four power stations will not—at least until 1996—introduce any merit order competition. As the Minister is aware, the costs of producing electricity are heavily dependent on the initial design of the power station. As a consequence, each station has a secure place in the merit order list. Together with the need to ensure or guarantee security of supply, that means that all four stations must be used for some proportion of almost every day. Consequently, competition will become significant, as the Minister said, only once new capacity has been provided, and that will not happen this side of 1996.

I have a word of caution for the Minister. Even that gain may prove to be illusory unless the new supplier is given a disproportionate share of the market. Unless it is given a disproportionate share of the market, other, less efficient, plant will still be required to maintain security of supply, which, again, will effectively rule out any merit order competition. There is a strong possibility that, even after 1996, there could be no real financial benefit from competition in the generating sector.

I am sure that the whole House welcomes the proposed interconnector between Scotland and Northern Ireland, but, again, it is not a consequence of privatisation. The Minister should be wary of overestimating or exaggerating the economic benefit that it will bring. It will diversify the fuel mix available to the Province, but it will be of financial benefit to the Province—the Minister failed to mention this—only if we are able to obtain European Community grants to underwrite the capital cost of providing the interconnector in the first place.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman is contjnuing to read out his speech regardless of what I said. I made it absolutely clear that we have approached Commissioner Millan, and he is looking most favourably at our application for grant. I hope that the hon. Gentleman makes that point clear.

Mr. Marshall: The Minister probably misunderstood or misheard what I said. I said that the electricity will be cheap compared with present prices in the Province only if an EC grant is available to underwrite the capital cost. I was going to say—I assure the Minister that this point is not in my speech—that we would wish the negotiations well and hope that the grant could be obtained so that the Province could have access to cheaper electricity.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it comes very strange to the people of Northern Ireland that the Minister has talked of getting a grant from Europe, when other grants are available at this time? Because we did not obtain an assurance that these would be additional payments which would not be used just to bolster Treasury handouts, those grants are not being claimed. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that reflects into the hearts of the people of Northern Ireland some hypocrisy, because we are talking about a grant from Europe, yet grants are available but we are not getting them because of Treasury humbug?

Mr. Marshall: I hesitate to use the word "humbug", but I take the hon. Gentleman's point. He and his colleagues from the Province will know that, over the past few years, I have been charging the Government with not using the principle of additionality in its correct way. Irrespective of the nationality of the Commissioner responsible in Brussels, it appears that the European Community has finally rumbled what the Government have been doing with European Community funds over the past few years. If we are able to get true additionality, as I hope that we will, we should see an increase in public expenditure not only in the Province but in other regions of the United Kingdom.

I have mentioned the interconnector. I claim—the Minister is wrong on this point—that it is not dependent upon privatisation. If it is to provide cheaper electricity to the Province, it will depend on a grant from the European Community, and we hope that the negotiations will succeed. However, I take a slightly different view on how the interconnector will work. I fear that it will not be used as an interconnector as such, which would reduce the need for extra capacity in the Province. Rather, it will be used as an alternative power station. In that sense, it will secure a place in the merit order and it will provide baseload electricity. If it fulfils that function, it will perform its function as an interconnector in reducing the need for surplus generating capacity. That would not lead to the reduction in costs which one could expect if it were used only as an interconnector.

We also welcome the provision of a natural gas pipeline to Northern Ireland. The biggest obstacle is not ownership by Northern Ireland but the capital cost of providing the pipeline in the first place. Again, that option will be available to the Province only if we are able to get funds from the European Community. Whether or not British Gas finally takes over Ballylumford, its ability to convert that station to the part burning of gas will be determined by financial considerations. Unless money is available from the European Community the company will not be prepared to finance the building of the pipeline out of its own resources. It will be feasible to do so only if external finance is available to underwrite the capital cost.

We accept the Government's view that the provision of natural gas could lead to more efficient electricity generation. In the longer term, that could affect prices, and that is to be applauded. We also welcome the idea that natural gas could provide a competitive alternative source in the wider energy market. It would be far better if industry and domestic consumers were able to choose between different forms of energy, rather than having to rely on electricity or coal, as is the case at present. Natural gas would have a major effect on the economy of Northern Ireland, and we would certainly give the Minister all the support that is required.

Mr. Needham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words of support about gas. If a Labour Government would not opt for privatisation—Opposition Members have clearly said that they would not—and a gas pipeline were to be brought to Northern Ireland; the maximum applicable amount under the EC rules is 35 per cent.—would the hon. Gentleman ensure that the remaining 65 per cent., which would not come from private funds, came from the Treasury?

Mr. Marshall: I am glad to remind the House of the Labour party's position on privatisation proposals. If the Minister will bear with me, he will see that the time scale that he foresees for the sale of the power stations and the timing of the next election would preclude that point.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman recall firm Labour commitments to support the provision of the gas pipeline to Northern Ireland? Has there been any change in that policy?

Mr. Marshall: There has been no change in our policy on the necessity, if practical, to provide a pipeline. We have made it clear that, if the sale of the power station proceeds—the Minister expects it to be completed by the end of March—we would not intend to take back those companies into public ownership. Any contracts into which the Government enter will be honoured by a future Labour Government.

On the transmission and supply company, which I understand will be wholly owned by the Department of Economic Development until it is floated, if that company is still owned by the DED after we win the next election, we shall retain it in public ownership, rather than proceed with the privatisation, as the Government would. If the transmission and supply company is still in the possession of the DED by the end of April or May, that company will remain publicly owned, but if the Government proceed with their proposals before the next election, we would give the same pledge about that as we have given on the other privatised industries——

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do how the Treasury works. He knows that the Treasury has assumed that it will gain certain proceeds during the year from the sale of TDS by a public flotation. Considerable sums are involved. Is the hon. Gentleman prepared to say where those hundreds of millions of pounds for the Treasury might otherwise come from? Or is he saying that, if his party was returned to government, other capital programmes in Northern Ireland would be cut because the funding would not then be available?

Mr. Marshall: I am surprised that the Minister should ask that question. If the Treasury is working on the premise that it already has money in its pocket for the power stations and from the sale of the transmission companies, and if it is including in its estimates for next year the proceeds from the sale of the Northern Ireland electricity industry, that shows laxity and ineptitude by its officials.

Let us put it another way: I do not think that the people of Northern Ireland would be pleased to be informed that the Treasury was already including in its accounts the

[Mr. Marshall]

proceeds from the sale of Northern Ireland Electricity—not to finance public expenditure, which is what the Minister sought to imply, but to pay for the election gimmick of 1p off income tax in the Budget in March. Instead of the proceeds being spent on increased public services, they will be used to finance the Tory election Budget bribe of 1p off income tax.

Mr. McGrady: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the supply company is not privatised, public funding will not be required to carry out a non-existent exercise?

Mr. Marshall: I shall let the hon. Gentleman develop that point later.

May I come to the conclusion of my speech—*[Interruption.]* I am sure that the House wishes to hear it. We welcome the introduction of natural gas to the Province and will give as much support as possible to encourage successful negotiations with the European Community so that the finance to provide the pipeline can be obtained. However, I repeat that the provision of a pipeline is not dependent either on the privatisation itself or on the form of that privatisation.

As I have said, the proposals represent a tremendous risk—a gamble—with the electricity supply industry in the Province. We should like the Government to reconsider those proposals even at this late stage. If the Government decide to proceed with the privatisation, we should prefer them—I ask the Government to think again about this—to float NIE, which is a vertically integrated company of proven worth. Like many people in the Province, we find the present proposals totally unacceptable. The Minister will not be surprised to learn that if, as I expect, a Division is called tonight, we intend to vote against the proposed order.

5.3 pm

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): As both the Minister and the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) have said, the Select Committee on Energy has spent a considerable amount of time considering the possible privatisation of the electricity industry in Northern Ireland. One reason for that was that hon. Members representing Northern Ireland made it known to the Select Committee that they were somewhat disturbed by the fact that the privatisation proposals relating to Northern Ireland would pass through the House without debate, and that they were therefore being denied the opportunity to present any case that they might wish to present.

On checking, I learned from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that there had been three days' debate on the proposals in the Northern Ireland Committee. Even so, the Select Committee on Energy thought it appropriate to give wider coverage to the issues involved in privatising the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland. We took evidence from all the parties in Northern Ireland that wished to come to see us, from the Northern Ireland electricity supply industry, from civic dignitaries in Northern Ireland and from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who gave generously of his time.

As has been said, our report stated that the proposals to privatise the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland had some admirable features. In particular, we liked the proposal that there should be bidding for the right to supply and provide any new capacity for electricity generation in Northern Ireland. We also welcomed the proposed non-fossil fuel obligation, which I believe would also be welcomed by the hon. Member for Leicester, South.

There are some favourable sites for wind generation in Northern Ireland. I believe that a 300 kW generator has now been commissioned. It is only right that that should be encouraged and that there should be more wind generation in the Province. Small-scale hydro-generation should also be encouraged in the Province. Apart from some areas in the north, there is little scope for hydro-generation in England, but that is not the case in Scotland and in Northern Ireland.

We also praised the Northern Ireland Office's innovative proposals for encouraging energy efficiency, and welcomed the possibility of new supplies of fuel being brought to Northern Ireland, such as through the gas pipeline and the interconnectors. We welcome the fact that the interconnectors will not only come from Scotland, that my hon. Friend has said that he is determined to rebuild the interconnector from Eire. The Select Committee welcomed that decision. I hope that the people of Northern Ireland will do so as well, because it would be an interconnector not only of electricity but of good will.

However, we pointed out that not all the proposals that we thought admirable were wholly dependent on privatisation. Some of the things that are now being suggested could have been carried out in the past—or could be carried out now or in the future—without the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland necessarily being privatised.

As I said when I intervened earlier in my hon. Friend the Minister's speech, we accept that things do not always get done as one might wish. If privatisation acts as a catalyst by highlighting a problem that has been pushed to one side or by emphasising a solution and hastening its implementation, then we welcome it. If the privatisation proposals have brought to the attention of the Northern Ireland Office the possibility of bringing new fuels to Northern Ireland, which would help to regenerate the economy of the Province by, we hope, ultimately bringing about cheaper electricity, we welcome them.

In 1988, the Select Committee on Energy emphasised the need for competition in the electricity industry in Northern Ireland. I recognise the special difficulties of Northern Ireland. It is possible that those special difficulties might make competition more difficult to obtain, because those who wish to invest in electricity generation may not see Northern Ireland as an attractive area in which to do so.

I also accept that the market in the Province is not too large. Therefore, it will not attract money as the large market of the mainland did. However, if privatisation attracts competition, that competition alone should make privatisation attractive. Competition should bring cheaper prices, which should help to regenerate a difficult and problematic economy.

The Government's proposals to break up Northern Ireland Electricity into the four power stations and the distribution company Northern Ireland Electricity (Transmission, Distribution and Supply) follows to a large extent the pattern adopted in the rest of Great Britain. It should be welcomed in principle. Indeed, if we reprivatised electricity supply on the mainland, we would follow much

the same pattern, the only difference being that we would break down the generators into more than the present foursome of National Power, PowerGen, Nuclear Electric and Scottish Power.

I, the Select Committee and many other pople believe that we did not go quite far enough in the electricity privatisation on the mainland. Therefore, it is not a matter of saying that the industry in Northern Ireland should stay together as one entity. One could perhaps say that the previous privatisation did not go far enough.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the Government chose a different process for Scotland, which has a similar mix of rural and urban and is also relatively small? Why did they go for vertical integration in Scotland rather than the proposal that they have made for Northern Ireland?

Dr. Clark: That question should properly be addressed to my hon. Friends the Ministers. The reason for the difference between England and Scotland—which is what I thought the hon. Gentleman was going to ask about—was the complex nature of generation in Scotland. The south of Scotland is heavily dependent on nuclear electricity, so it could not easily be separated out. The north is heavily dependent on hydro-electricity. That, coupled with the fact that, north of the two large cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, Scotland has a sparse population by the standards of the rest of the island, meant that there had to be a special case for vertical integration over a sparesly populated area.

I see the hon. Gentleman smile. I am trying to second-guess my hon. Friend the Minister. If I am not doing it well, I hope that he will forgive me. If I am doing it brilliantly, I hope that he will praise me. Northern Ireland is much smaller than Scotland. By and large, the population is more concentrated. With its four power stations, it lends itself more readily to being broken up into competitive generators. One hopes that more generators will come along.

I agree with the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) that we have still to assess the benefits of breaking up the organisation in Northern Ireland. While undoubtedly, in the fulness of time, competition between the four power stations will bring advantages, in the first instance the loss of economies of scale will bring disadvantages. It will be up to the generators to ensure that they quickly overcome the loss of those economies of scale and show that competition brings savings greater than the losses incurred by breaking up a single entity.

We said in our report that it was a little unclear from the Government's proposals how power purchase agreements would work between the generators and NIE (TDS). How can the consumer be sure that NIE (TDS) will purchase competitively from the generators, particularly as the Government's proposals make provision for the generators to pass on price fluctuations to TDS? Presumably TDS will pass on the fluctuations to Northern Ireland consumers.

I put it to the Minister that there is a need to ensure that the regulator is properly briefed and has the right powers to check carefully that the generators do not pass on bogus price fluctuations, and that they pass on drops in price as quickly as price rises.

The Select Committee made 12 recommendations in its report, and I wish to spend a little time on six of them. One of our recommendations was that the Government should provide in the licence to NIE an independent way to supply electricity directly from the Scottish interconnector. If a large energy user wishes to buy directly from the interconnector instead of through NIE (TDS), it should have the opportunity to do so. If not, there will be a danger that NIE (TDS) will become semi-monopolistic and buy in bulk without passing on its bulk purchase advantages.

One way to keep TDS sharp will be to ensure that large companies which have the purchasing power and ability to do so can buy independently from the Scottish interconnector. That would mean five suppliers of electricity in Northern Ireland—the four power stations plus the interconnector. The interconnector could be seen as another direct supplier to Northern Ireland. If we really believe in competition and breaking down the Northern Ireland supply industry into smaller units, the interconnector from Scotland should be allowed to make the number of generators in Northern Ireland five instead of four.

We made another recommendation about power purchase agreements. One hopes that generators will have incentives to enter into arrangements for price smoothing. They already have the facility to enter into long-term contracts. Indeed, they will inherit some contracts which will continue for another 20 years or more. One must be careful with price smoothing. Companies have to buy forward and make agreements with the generators, but it is no way to run an economy to have electricity prices constantly going up and down.

If prices constantly go down, it is fine. If prices constantly go up, it is not fine but it can be allowed for. But when prices go up and down, it is difficult for any industry anywhere in the world, and perhaps especially in Northern Ireland, to set its costs right so that it can compete on the world and, indeed, the home market. The Select Committee wondered whether it would be possible for the power purchase agreements to allow for some price smoothing and to give incentives for that allowance.

The Committee also made a recommendation about the existing long-term contract. We understand that at least one contract will continue until the year 2024. It is not always certain that to continue the contract is in the best interest of the electricity consumers of Northern Ireland. It is hardly compatible with competition and the moving markets that it tends to encourage and thrive on for a company to be tied to one contract for the next 32 years. Is there any way in which those long-term contracts could be terminated? One does not wish to be unfair to the people who entered into it. It may be necessary to compensate those who lose the contract with Northern Ireland Electricity.

Again, perhaps the regulator would have to be involved. If he were involved strongly enough, it is possible that the long-term contract could be modified voluntarily. If not, perhaps it could be terminated, with appropriate —whatever that word might mean—compensation for the supplier who had lost a long-term contract.

The next recommendation concerns the regulator. The rest of Great Britain has an admirable regulator, and there has been debate about whether he should be given the responsibility of regulating electricity supply in Northern Ireland. The argument for saying that he should is that he is able, he is experienced, he has had a hand in drafting the regulatory framework, and he would be able to bring a lot of that experience to the Northern Ireland electricity industry.

[Dr. Clark]

Hon. Members representing Northern Ireland draw to our attention the argument against, which is that Northern Ireland is a special case. It prefers someone who is domiciled in Northern Ireland to look after its business. Far too often, Northern Ireland business is regulated—in whichever way one wishes to use the word "regulate"—from London or from the mainland. There is therefore a case for having someone specifically allocated to Northern Ireland.

I think that there is a happy combination of the two, and I believe that that view is shared by members of the Committee. A regulator should be located in Belfast, or some other suitable place, with the sole responsibility of regulating the Northern Ireland electricity supply industry, but he could be under the wing of the United Kingdom regulator, so that he could call upon his experience and on the framework of practice which he has established, thus bringing the best of both worlds to the Province. There could be a Northern Ireland regulator domiciled there, but acting within the framework of the regulator for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Another recommendation in the report was that the regulator needs to ensure that the capacity contracted by NIE(TDS) is required and has been chosen on a fully competitive basis, and he must satisfy the regulator accordingly. There is always the danger that NIE may contract capacity which does not have a proven need or a visibly competitive price. The Committee was anxious that that should not be the case and that the regulator should have appropriate powers to ensure that all contracted capacity is needed and that the price is competitive.

If that does not happen, electricity in Northern Ireland will be more expensive than it need be, because built into its price will be an element to cover electricity which has been contracted but is not truly needed.

The final recommendation that I wish to mention, although the report contains another six, concerns energy efficiency. As we understand it, it is proposed that the generators can keep all the benefits of any efficiency that they may achieve in generation. We consider that that is not entirely appropriate, because some benefits should be passed on. To some extent, consumers should get the benefit of more efficient generation. Otherwise, a company which bought the least efficient power station in Northern Ireland in a trade sale—presumably for the cheapest price—could turn it into a fairly efficient power station, although no great shakes, and by so doing would have saved a lot of generating costs in fuel burned and would keep it all for itself, rather than passing any savings on to the consumer.

The consumers will still be charged as though the electricity were generated in an inefficient power station, although the owners of the station, by making it more efficient, will benefit and will have bought the station at a cheap price. There must be an incentive for efficiency, and some of the savings must be directed to the coffers of the owners of the power stations, but some must also pass to the consumer; otherwise, there will be no pressure from consumers for the generator to put his house in order.

As the Minister told us in Committee and in the House, Northern Ireland has historically relied on oil for 70 per cent. of its electricity generation. The industry is fairly isolated due to the geography of the Province, and has industrial disadvantages. We learned from industrialists who came before the Committee of the handicaps they suffer due to adverse electricity prices compared with those in the rest of Great Britain. I and the Committee believe that privatisation will go a considerable way to removing isolation, removing dependency on oil and helping the Northern Ireland economy along the road that we all want for it.

Significantly, the Northern Ireland electricity industry will be in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland, who will have an opportunity to purchase shares of NIE (TDS). On behalf of the people of Northern Ireland, I hope that there will be some scrutiny of those bidding for the four power stations in Northern Ireland to ensure that, if they do not go to Northern Ireland nationals, at least they go to people or organisations with the interests of Northern Ireland at heart.

5.26 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): While my colleagues and I are aware that the debate will effect no change in the Order in Council, we still wish to discuss these issues until there are changes that would provide more realism.

On 20 March last year, when the proposals to privatise NIE were announced in the House by the Secretary of State for Energy, my party made it clear that it opposed those proposals. I was pleased to have the support then and later of all the other political parties in Northern Ireland for that position.

The Minister has drawn attention to a number of factors in the rather lengthy submission put forward. I do not intend to repeat all that, but, having declared our opposition, we canvassed the views of many interested parties in Northern Ireland, including our constituents, of Northern Ireland Electricity employees at all levels and of the trade unions, bearing in mind their special and specific interests. We took the opportunity to consult the Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Economic Development and the chairman of Northern Ireland Electricity. As a result of those consultations, we felt justified in holding to the opinion that the privatisation proposals, as put forward, would not be of benefit to the development of the energy industry in Northern Ireland.

We pledged our support to the employee buy-out to ensure that some Ulster hands would be on future generation. In view of the Government's intransigence and determination to push through the transfer of NIE to the private sector, with complete disregard for the united opposition from all parties in Northern Ireland and from the Opposition parties at Westminster, we were keen to support the employee buy-out so that some Ulster people would have an involvement in the new electricity companies.

The proposals will not bring competition to the electricity industry in the Province. They will not bring benefit to the Northern Ireland economy, to the people of Northern Ireland or to the energy industry in the Province. I accept that real competition will be the key to lowering costs and that prices are and will remain high for as long as we remain over-dependent on oil for generation. It must also be borne in mind that our generating sets are extremely small compared with mainland generating stations and that we need to maintain a surplus for safety.

Real competition will come only when there is a demand for new capacity. Therefore, these proposals are, if anything, premature.

Mr. Needham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's point about real competition being the key. Can he explain how a vertical, integrated structure would allow competition at the point where we both agree competition is vital—the new generating set? Surely a vertically integrated structure would in itself be a major hindrance to any outsider coming in, because he would be faced with a private monopoly against which he would have to compete.

Mr. Beggs: The Minister has gone to great lengths to assure us of the strength of the regulations that will be in place. He must also recognise that the likelihood of gas for generation changes the entire picture. He must recognise the possibility of future generation using lignite. Only then will we see the real possibilities and a fall in prices.

Our opposition is not based on dogmatic ideology; it is on a practical level. We have been confronted by a wall of dogmatic ideology which has shown little understanding of the issues at stake. Privatisation theory has been manipulated for the purposes of these proposals which will not satisfy the free market. Our only ideological ground and the ground that we occupy on this matter is what is best for the people of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman accuses the Government of dogmatic intransigence, but the Government carefully took the advice of the Select Committee, which was that we should go down the route not of a vertically integrated structure, but of as much competition in generation as possible. Is he accusing the Select Committee of a dogmatic, doctrinaire position?

Mr. Beggs: As the Minister knows, most Committees of this House on all occasions have a majority representation of Government Members. I am sure that he will accept that, when a vote is called, it will always favour Government proposals, whether or not other members of the Committee have participated in the business.

Mr. Jim Marshall: I do not want the Minister to give a misleading account of the Select Committee's suggestion. It was that the best way to create competition in the electricity supply industry was by encouraging competition in the generating sector.

Dr. Michael Clark *indicated assent.*

Mr. Marshall: I see the Chairman of the Select Committee agreeing on that. The questions that must be asked—the Select Committee did not come to a definite conclusion on this—is whether competition can be introduced into the generating sector of NIE as it exists and whether further developments of power stations are likely to enhance the prospect of greater competition.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, and I shall deal with it shortly. Meantime, one notes the absence of any necessity for major representation of Conservative Members in the House during this debate. That is for the simple reason that, when a vote is taken at whatever time this evening, there will be sufficient numbers to see through the Government's policies.

Dr. Clark: May I clarify the composition of the Energy Select Committee? There are six Members from the Government side and five from the Opposition Benches. The Chairman has a casting vote only—he does not have a primary vote. Therefore, the ratio is 5:5, with a Chairman who happens to be from the Government side. In any event, this particular report was passed unanimously and there was no need for any vote at any stage in our deliberations.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution and I accept what he says. I hope that he too will accept that those of us who come from the Province are at the coal face. We are fully aware of the difficulties facing NIE and its management. We are aware that, if previous Northern Ireland Ministers had had the same enthusiasm for a gas pipeline or for providing interconnection, the moneys might have been voted to the NIE which would have carried out the direction dutifully.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In its conclusions, the Energy Select Committee report emphasises:

"In 1988 we emphasised the need for competition in generating if Northern Ireland consumers were to benefit from privatisation, and it is disappointing that the degree of competition the Government's proposals will make possible is so limited."

The Committee criticised the proposals rather than, as the Minister suggested, more or less put a benediction on them, if I may use that theological term.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that contribution, and I am coming to that point.

The general duty of the Department, as stated in article 4 of the electricity order, is to promote competition in the generation and supply of electricity. These proposals will not facilitate the exercise of that duty, because genuine competition will not be possible at this time. Any competition that prevails will be under the artificial conditions for competition devised by the Department of Economic Development.

NIE is a vertically integrated generation, transmission, distribution and supply industry. As yet, there is no interconnection with the mainland grid. The interconnector to the Republic of Ireland was not reinstated following its destruction by terrorists. Practically all generation of electricity in the Province is at the four power stations, which operate on a merit order system, whereby a central control unit places first in merit order whichever generating sets are producing the cheapest electricity at a given time. Consequently, the four power stations can be seen as one unit. I defy anyone to say that we can suddenly create competition between them. They already compete to provide the cheapest possible electricity to the people of Northern Ireland. Only when there is new generation will there be greater competition.

The general intention of the order is that it should depart from the model of the Electricity Act 1989 only where local circumstances make it necessary or desirable to do so. That does not take account of the great difference between the electricity industries in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland. The fact that the Northern Ireland grid is isolated has not been given due consideration and neither has the size of the Northern Ireland system. In Northern Ireland, generating capacity, is 2,100 MW, but in Great Britain it is about 67,000 MW.

[Mr. Beggs]

The maximum demand recorded in Ulster from 1987 to 1989 was 1,326 MW, compared with 46,935 MW in England and Wales.

Because of the small size of the Northern Ireland system, the economies of scale available in the larger systems in England and Wales cannot be achieved. The consequence is that, in Northern Ireland, the optimum set size is about 140 MW compared with 600 MW sets in use in England and Wales. Furthermore, a system using smaller generating sets must maintain a higher reserve capacity. Such a system cannot be privatised by simplistic adaptation of the Electricity Act 1989. Paragraph 69(1) of the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order states:

"Before such a date as the Department may direct, Northern Ireland Electricity shall make a scheme (a 'transfer scheme') for the division of all its assets and liabilities (other than excepted rights and liabilities) between 2 or more companies nominated by the Department for the purposes of this paragraph; and of the companies so nominated—

(a) one shall be designated as a generating company; and

(b) one shall be designated as a transmission and supply company."

My party would accept privatisation of NIE, as a vertically integrated system, but the Government have a short-sighted view that would simply replace a public monopoly with a private one. We are prepared to look to the future of the entire energy industry in Northern Ireland rather than to adopt a short-term policy for one aspect of that vital industry because of political ideology. It will be detrimental to the development of the energy industry of Northern Ireland to divide NIE into separate units for the sake of staging a charade with regard to competition.

Belfast West and Coolkeeragh power stations are due to be retired by 1998 and 2004. They play a full role in the merit order system and would continue to do so in a vertically integrated industry, whether NIE were privatised or not.

I accept the economic reality that the combined cycle gas turbine conversion of Kilroot would make economic sense, but that has become a reality only since the commitment to bring gas to Northern Ireland. Has NIE in the past been prohibited by the Government from receiving the necessary funding to install the pipeline? We cannot allow the Minister to pass all the blame to NIE and its management and to claim all the achievements. That must be challenged. Had previous Ministers been as enthusiastic and foresighted as the present one, money could have been found to provide this link.

Even so, the Minister has asked several times where the money would be found to provide the pipelines. However, he is much more aware than I of the tremendous profits that were generated by NIE last year. I am sure that, if two years' profits, which were huge, had been allowed to go towards the cost of the gas pipeline, the profits of the next two years would have provided the necessary share of the cost of the interconnector. If NIE had had the freedom and encouragement, we might have had the gas pipeline in place and the interconnector installed.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. In a year when profits of about £90 million were made, electricity prices went up between 8 and 9 per cent. Was that money reinvested in the Northern Ireland Electricity Service, or was it kept in the kitty to be an attractive selling point when privatisation arose? That is a crucial question.

Mr. Beggs: I can only say that the hon. Gentleman has rightly raised our suspicions about the fact that there has been a lot of encouragement recently to fatten the calf, as the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said. NIE has suddenly become attractive for a sell-off, and it is possible—only the Minister can tell us—that the money went straight into the kitty, because we know that the Government are a bit hard up.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with interest. He has asked the Minister about the cost of providing the interconnector and the gas pipeline. I believe that the profits of NIE were paid directly into the Treasury. If that were the case, what the Treasury has done with that money—or some of it—is to reimburse some of the poll tax payers in the rest of the United Kingdom because of the awful mess that the Government made of it. The Government have put £44 million of wasteful expenditure into a tax that is universally reviled. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues should be grateful that that tax was not visited upon them and the rest of Northern Ireland. NIE's profits have probably gone to offset the mammoth cock-up of the poll tax.

Mr. Beggs: I cannot comment on that, but it is a possible explanation of what might have happened.

Mr. Needham: I believe that I can help the hon. Gentleman. NIE's accumulated losses in the past were substantial, and therefore the profits that it has made recently have helped to cover those losses. In fact, the hon. Gentleman's argument supports the case for getting NIE out of the hands of the Treasury and the claws of public expenditure constraints and establishing a competitive system. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's help on that argument.

Mr. Beggs: I am grateful for the Minister's observation, but I remind him that, if there is one thing that aggravates and annoys the Northern Ireland electorate, irrespective of which political group they owe allegiance to, it is the suggestion that they have been unwilling to pay their way or that they are spongers. We can all take pride in the achievements of NIE in clearing its outstanding debts and ensuring that we are paying our way. We are also paying our way by providing cheaper energy resources and better connections with the mainland.

Mr. McGrady: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, when the Minister was asked in Committee about the £90 million profit, his response was not that it had gone to the Treasury but that it had been kept in the coffers of Northern Ireland Electricity for future capital expenditure? The hon. Gentleman should also point out that the profit was so great because depreciation was not charged, although depreciation of capital assets had exterminated the assets many years before. Which story are we to believe about the end product of that money?

Mr. Beggs: There is an old saying that you live and learn. As I come from Larne, I am still learning, and I have learnt a lot more this afternoon.

I do not want to get lost altogether. It would be ungracious not to recognise the Minister's commitment in

helping to make possible the natural gas supply to Northern Ireland. We appreciate that. I hope that the Minister will clarify—I did not quite catch his earlier remarks—whether British Gas will be responsible for the pipeline and whether it will be most likely to be favoured with the opportunity of operating it in Ballylumford power station. We all look forward to the additional spin-off and the possibility of downstream employment. New jobs will always be welcomed, though it is doubtful whether those will balance the overall number of jobs likely to be lost in the industry.

In welcoming article 4(5), which says that the Department will take into account the protection of consumers in rural areas, and paragraph (6), which says that the Department will take into account the interests of pensioners and the disabled, I wondered why there was no special provision for infants and children under school age, who are often at risk in low-income households. Why were they not included?

Mr. Mallon: In relation to the £90 million that somehow left the system, surely it could be argued that, in a year when substantial profits were made, that sum should have been ploughed back into the infrastructure, especially in rural areas where the supply of electricity and the structural requirements are inadequate. It is crucial that we realise that that money could have been used where it was needed and, as the Minister said earlier, we could have been standing on a level playing field. The playing field simply is not level and, unfortunately, the money to make it level has been handed over.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his observations. There is no doubt that, in any industry or enterprise, profits should be reinvested for the betterment of that industry and those served by it.

Reference is made throughout the order to fees that may be prescribed in respect of a licence authorising the supply of electricity. Does the Minister recognise that, in the case of very small generators, especially those using non-fossil fuels, exorbitant licence fees could render generation uneconomic? Will he assure us that licence fees will be kept reasonable? What is the likely scale of fees and the circumstances of exemption from the need to have a licence to supply or generate electricity?

Article 15(1) states:

"The Director may make to the Monopolies Commission a reference which is so framed as to require the Commission to investigate and report".

Has the proposed sell-off of Ballylumford power station to what appears to be the most-favoured purchaser been considered by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission or the Office of Fair Trading, or is the Minister confident that none of the disappointed bidders will follow that course, feeling aggrieved?

In welcoming the planned interconnection between Northern Ireland and the national electricity grid as a right of Northern Ireland Electricity consumers, I am conscious of the fact that, although that decision will not necessarily create new jobs in Scotland, it is likely to reduce jobs in Northern Ireland, especially in my constituency. We depend very much on overall prosperity within the Northern Ireland economy creating additional jobs. The House will be interested to know how many jobs have been lost to date through voluntary redundancies in Northern Ireland Electricity's reorganisation. How many more job losses does the Minister expect after privatisation?

Similarly, the promise of a natural gas pipeline to Northern Ireland became popular because it too is likely to attract EC funding, as gas will be used for generation in Northern Ireland power stations in future. However, there is a cheaper option than installing costly equipment in power stations and burning oil and coal to achieve compliance with EC standards on emissions from power stations. That has played the biggest part in the urgency to get gas to Northern Ireland. The Scottish interconnector and the gas pipeline would have happened long ago had the Government and the Northern Ireland departments so directed and funded NIE. Those projects are therefore not happening simply as a result of privatisation of our electricity industry.

I welcome and look forward to the study on non-fossil fuels which the Minister said will be published in April this year. Article 35 deals with electricity from non-fossil fuel sources. Can the Minister advise the House on the non-fossil fuel obligation in Northern Ireland? Can he give an undertaking that Scottish Hydro will not swallow up the total allocation in respect of Northern Ireland, and that Northern Ireland generators will have incentives to expand and develop hydro-electric and wind generation through contracts that are sufficiently long to secure the return of capital investment?

In encouraging wind generation, the Minister will need to look closely at the eastern side of the Province, so much of which has been designated as areas of outstanding natural beauty that it is virtually impossible to develop the land to provide employment. My constituents and I believe that insufficient encouragement is given to Northern Ireland generators to maximise the generation potential of non-fossil fuel sources. We would welcome any support given to wind farms and hydro-electric generation. It is surprising that more has not been done in that area, because we are over-dependent on non-renewable energy sources. I hope that it will be possible to provide generators using non-fossil fuels with fairer prices for generation in the future and to give them the incentive to help them to recover capital investments and research project costs.

Article 53 refers to a report from the director general of electricity being laid before the Assembly. It also refers to copies of directions given by the Department being laid before the Assembly, subject to certain conditions. I think that we all welcome the confidence expressed in the order that there will soon be an Assembly in Northern Ireland. Can the Minister confirm that today's talks have been successful and that much progress has been made which should fill us with optimism for the future?

Article 87 deals with compensation to members and employees of NIE. What are the minimum and maximum redundancy payments that have been made or offered to date? We want to know a little of what is happening, without causing any breaches of confidence.

Schedule 1 deals with pensions. We all wish to be assured that former employees of NIE will not be worse off in the successor companies. We want those companies to be under a legal obligation to ensure that the benefits that pensioners and contributors have already earned will be fully protected.

Schedule 2 deals with the consumer committee for electricty and the possibility of sub-committees, including local ones, being set up. I hope that the Minister will use his influence with the director general of electricity supply

[Mr. Beggs]

for Northern Ireland, when he or she is appointed, to encourage the appointment of elected representative of constitutional political parties to such committees.

It is a matter of great regret that the opposition of Northern Ireland political parties to the Government's proposals to privatise NIE has not been recognised and the alternative of a vertically integrated privatised electricity industry is unacceptable. I am disappointed at the crumb that is likely to be offered to the employee buy-out. Some people have been sceptical, and believe that the privatisation process was sewn up long ago in favour of favourite bidders.

We shall be dependent on strong regulations in Northern Ireland to keep prices down when costs rise, as I believe they will. The contrived privatisation of electricity in Northern Ireland may not prove to be in the best interests of the country. For that reason, my colleagues and I will have to vote against the order. We still believe that a vertically integrated electricity industry, with its natural gas and with the Scottish connector in place, would provide a secure system and, ultimately, competition at the right price for consumers in Northern Ireland.

6.4 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I understand that the Minister began by passing strictures on absentees from the debate. Some of us had business with the Secretary of State and were asked to be present at a meeting. We made representations saying that today's important debate would be in progress, but we were told that it was our duty to attend another place. I greatly resent the fact that a Minister who knew that should pass strictures on us.

Mr. Needham: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I had absolutely no intention of suggesting that he was not in his place, as I was well aware of the importance of the meeting that he was attending. I was referring not to the hon. Gentleman or his colleagues but to some of his hon. Friends, whom I had expected might have been present. I was looking forward to hearing their contributions and entering into debate with them. If my disappointment was slightly exaggerated, I willingly apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

Rev. Ian Paisley: My Friends experienced difficulty getting to the House because of the fog. I, too, expected them to be present. Their absence was not because of fog in their minds. I think that they would have dispelled the fog in the Minister's mind as to their views on privatisation. I accept the Minister's explanation. My colleagues and I were absent not out of any discourtesy to him. Because of business in another part of the House, I may not be present during the Minister's winding-up speech, but I shall diligently read what he says and no doubt talk to him about it later.

I greatly regret that the Government are making such speed on the legislation. I thought that we should have had fuller consultation on the matter. I notice that on page XXII, paragraph 55, the Minister's Committee, which he praised, said:

"We emphasise the need for the Government to clarify matters such as these before pushing ahead".

We have not received that clarification. I do not know whether the Minister has clarified matters.

The report continues:

"we recommend that the Secretary of State arrange detailed consultations with the Northern Ireland political parties before the legislation is finalised."

Dr. Michael Clark: I am perhaps speaking on behalf of the Minister as well as myself. The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to the Minister's report—the Minister may not wish to own the report, but I am delighted to do so. It is the report of the Select Committee on Energy, not the Minister's.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I apologise for dubbing the report with the Minister's name. I am sure that if its pages could speak, they would cry out mightily and say that they want no connection with the Minister. I apologise for the fact that I made the slip, and I apologise to the Select Committee Chairman, the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark).

The report, which the Minister earlier called to his aid, stated:

"We recommend that the Secretary of State arrange detailed consultations".

I do not know whether the Secretary of State did so, but neither I nor any of my friends were invited. In fairness to the Minister, he did have consultations with us, but they were at a lower level, not at a high level. The three leaders of the political parties in the House expressed a desire to talk to the Prime Minister on this subject, but that meeting was not forthcoming.

We feel that there has been a bit of a rush. As the Minister knows, Northern Ireland is a great place for rumours. I do not know why there is such a rush, but people tell me that all sorts of things are happening. I do not think that it is good for the Province to have a question mark hanging over such an important decision. Caesar's wife should be beyond accusation—the Minister has been unduly hasty on the matter. He must now tell the House why there is such a rush. Are the lamps going to go out in the streets? Is there going to be a crisis?

I trust that the Minister will tell us and lay to rest the serious accusations that have been made about the fattening of the calf. It certainly was not being fattened for the return of a prodigal son but was being fattened for the return of other people who, for some time, had not been as prominent as they might have wanted to be. Here they have the opportunity to be so. I could go on and on——

Mr. Needham: It was a very mangy beast that was being fattened. It made £350 million-worth of losses, so it was a little short of sustenance. The profits that it has since made have gone some way towards giving it back its proper weight and colour, which it needs if we are to have a successful industry in Northern Ireland.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am sure that the Minister has little farming experience, although his forebears practised farming in South Down. If he knows the scriptures, he will remember that it was the lean kine that had the enormous appetites, swallowing up the well-reared kine. Perhaps this swallowing is taking place to make the beasts in question even fatter.

I want to know about the future. It has already been suggested that the generating stations that do not look so good now could be given cosmetic treatment to make them very profitable—but consumers would not benefit from such an exercise. We should keep our eye on that.

I do not believe that the Minister's ideal of competition will mean lower prices. I do not think that we will have real competition under the Government's scheme. In fact, consumer prices will rise. There will be a detrimental effect on those employed by NIE—the scheme will lead to unemployment. The Minister has already been challenged to say how many people have been made redundant or have taken voluntary redundancy. Employment prospects in NIE are not good.

I remind the Minister that when he met my colleagues and me I asked whether he could guarantee people's jobs. He brought his fist down on the table and said, "You know that you cannot ask a question like that and get an answer, because I don't know." That was at least an honest answer, but the trickle-down effect has already started; we fear that the trickle may become a torrent and that many jobs will be lost in the industry.

The Government claim that the privatisation scheme will introduce forms of competition that will result in the lowest possible prices for consumers. Are the Government really introducing such forms of competition across the board? They are not. Their ideal—making electricity prices lower—would be welcome, but the proposals are fundamentally flawed. The Northern Ireland marketplace is neither large enough nor diverse enough to sustain the amount of competition that the Government think will follow.

I am glad that the Select Committee's report pointed out that very factor in its conclusions. Paragraph 54 reads:

"In 1988 we emphasised the need for competition in generating if Northern Ireland consumers were to benefit from privatisation, and it is disappointing that the degree of competition the Government proposals will make possible is so limited."

Competition, which was to be the be-all and end-all of the great scheme, is limited; yet the Minister has introduced it with great gusto. He has been smiling on the television box and has been going around the country telling people about the great advantages of competition—despite the lack of it.

Mr. Needham: Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of competition, as suggested by the Select Committee?

Rev. Ian Paisley: I am in favour of competition right across the board, but I have said already that Northern Ireland's size and the capacity that it has make competition difficult.

I was thoroughly examined by the Select Committee on Energy, whose members were tougher on me than on any other hon. Member. I told one of its members that he was asking hard questions and was told that they had been well prepared. I am glad that hon. Members are doing their job so well. I said:

"The Government appears to be operating from a standpoint that what is good for the rest of the United Kingdom is good enough for Ulster."

Of course, Opposition Members do not agree with privatisation anyway because they have a doctrinaire view on it. I, however, would be happy if what was good for the rest of the United Kingdom was good for us, but it definitely is not—Northern Ireland happens to be different.

I gather that the Prime Minister has told the people of Scotland that, if they are to have devolution, they will have to pay for it in the form of a special tax. I do not know how much the Minister plans to make us pay if we get some sort of devolved government. It will be something more than a poll tax—it will be a new Assembly tax which we will have to pay for the privilege of democratically taking our own decisions.

To return to my evidence to the Select Committee, I said:

"Everyone who knows about dependent economies and knows about Ulster's social and economic problems will understand that there are certain intrinsic differences which mark Ulster as a place for special consideration. I believe that this legislation will severely handicap Northern Ireland. I also believe that the Government's proposals have not in themselves been properly thought through."

It was clear at our meeting with the Minister that the new boss thought that the privatisation proposal was the most complicated development that he had encountered in his business career. It is certainly not all plain sailing, as the Minister would have us believe.

Did the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland think that privatisation would be wonderful for consumers? I know that the Minister burned the midnight oil, reading, with his glasses well shined, a document called "Privatising Electricity in Northern Ireland: The Consumer Perspective". I know that he spent a great deal of time parsing the sentences of that report. It said that 48 per cent. of those surveyed were opposed to privatisation. Only 4 per cent. of those surveyed were strongly in favour of privatisation. Thirty-seven per cent. concluded that privatisation would make no difference in terms of efficiency, compared with 10 per cent. who claimed that NIE would be more efficient if privately owned.

It was also agreed by a majority of those surveyed that prices would rise under private ownership. The consumer council's chairman, Lady McCollum, said:

"as far as consumers are concerned the quality of service and price of electricity are more important than who owns the industry."

I agree. She went on:

"competition as a general rule benefits consumers but the small size of the Province's system may restrict the scope for such benefits here."

That was a warning shot across the Minister's bows.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman says that he is in favour of competition. What sort of competition would he like to see introduced to Northern Ireland's electricity system?

Rev. Ian Paisley: If the Minister follows the thread of my argument, he will understand that I am saying that, because of Northern Ireland's size and its dependent economy, it is difficult to have competition. The Minister's theory is that, because it works in the rest of the United Kingdom, it will work in Northern Ireland, but that is not so.

I have no doctrinal view on privatisation, but I know that Northern Ireland Electricity does a good job to the best of its ability and delivers the goods very well. Every hon. Member knows that difficulties and costs are associated with linkage, but I do not think that privatisation will cut those costs. The Minister could not say with his hand on his heart, "Yes, you will be able to link into the service more cheaply." If he did say that, I would doubt his word—I will not put it any higher than that.

The Government's proposal is unacceptable to the vast majority of Northern Ireland's people. No business men have knocked on my door saying, "Let us get this

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

privatised." People in the business community have the same view as general consumers—that they will be badly hit.

I am sure that the Minister is a great supporter of the CBI and likes to quote it when it suits him. The CBI says:

"it is thus true to report that the proportion of business people in the Province are not wedded to privatisation".

The CBI says that not because it takes a doctrinaire stand but because it thinks that privatisation will

"be to the disadvantage to the Province from pure cost and supply."

Does the Minister think that he is right and that every-one else is wrong? Does he believe that surveys and business people are absolutely wrong and that he has found something that they have not? Time will show that the Minister has taken a wrong turn that will affect Northern Ireland, people more than it will affect him. During the time that he is in Northern Ireland, he uses only a little electricity, but the population burn the whole of the generated supply, and people will find that prices and the cost of interconnecting will increase. The competition that they have been told about will not occur. Where will that leave the population of Northern Ireland? People will be seriously affected.

Was the Northern Ireland Economic Council wrong when it said:

"against the disadvantages must be set the longer term damage to employment which may result if a major proportion of our electricity needs are met by imports rather than being generated by indigenous power stations"?

It would be better for the Minister to withdraw his Order in Council and to hold the consultations that were sought by the Select Committee on Energy. The matter should be looked at again; the Minister should lay down his crusading spear and take up a peace initiative with the people who are trying to get him to listen. We are asking the Minister just to listen to us; if he did, he might agree that there is something in what is being said.

As the Minister knows, not many issues unite Northern Ireland's people and on few occasions will he find all the political parties in the Province, including the Communist party, republicans, loyalists and Protestants saying, "Minister, you are wrong." That is happening, and the Minister should pay heed to it and realise that the greatest act that he could do for Northern Ireland would be to withdraw the proposals, listen to representations and look at the issue again. The matter has gone too fast and too far, and moves were going on before the legislation reached the House.

Mr. Stott: I am sure the hon. Gentleman remembers that the last time the constitutional parties that are represented in the House came together to oppose an Order in Council was on the Northern Ireland Education Reform Order. At that time, the hon. Gentleman and I and other hon. Members told the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), who had responsibility for education, that the time scale for implementation would have a catastrophic effect on education in Northern Ireland. The Minister's successor has finally listened to what we said two years ago. He slowed down the rate of implementation of the provisions of that order, because we were right and the Minister was wrong.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I should like the Minister to slow down and look at the matter again. Where is the money for advertisements coming from? Are they another effort to extend benefits to the companies that will buy into Northern Ireland Electricity? We are told that £50,000 is set aside for advertising. The people of Northern Ireland are not so naive as to believe the statement about the matter. According to a newspaper report,

"A spokesman refused to divulge how much the advert was costing and how much the leaflets that had been distributed are costing. He said 'All companies get involved in corporate credibility advertising. These ads are in response to our market research which showed that we were perceived as monopolistic and bureaucratic'."

Those advertisements praise privatisation even before it has been approved by the House.

During much of the progress that has been made, the House has been ignored. Before it has voted on the Order in Council, advertisements have appeared saying how good privatisation is. Who ordered those newspaper advertisements? How much did they cost, and why do they advertise privatisation of the industry before the House has placed its seal of approval on what the Minister seeks? If the Minister cannot answer in his winding-up speech, perhaps he will write to me on those matters.

6.30 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I hope that the Minister will agree to take cognisance of the fact that all Northern Ireland Members of Parliament, whatever their viewpoint or standpoint, are sincere in their endeavours to ensure that the result of this piece of legislation will benefit the people of Northern Ireland, be they large consumers or one-person households. It is a complex piece of legislation, and we are greatly concerned about it, because of its great potential for enhancing or destroying Northern Ireland's future, both economically and socially.

Because of its grave consequences, it is absolutely disgraceful that this legislation should come before the House in the form of an order. It should have come before the House as primary legislation. The order negatives a substantial part of the role played by hon. Members. It deprives them of the ability to amend or change one sentence, word or letter of the order. As it is impossible to change the order, I do not intend to deal with the details, which cannot be changed. Instead, I intend to address one or two of the principles that the Minister said underlie the order.

Before I do so, it is interesting to observe that, in his speech tonight, as in his contributions to the Committee proceedings and the consultative process, the Minister engaged the minds of the participants in the details and arrangements of the order and deflected many of them from continuing to deal with the principle of the exercise. He deflected the debate from unanimous opposition to the order, to its details.

At one point, the leader of the Ulster Unionist party said:

"We in the Ulster Unionist Party have no particular hang-ups on the arguments over the merits of privatisation."—[*Official Report*, 29 July 1988; Vol. 138, c. 606.]

At the first meeting of the Northern Ireland Committee, when referring to the proposed flotation of the transmission, distribution and supply company, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) said

that, if there was support for privatisation, he would be happy to do so, provided that the general public could apply for shares.

At the second afternoon sitting of the Northern Ireland Committee on 13 June 1991, the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe), who I understand is the Ulster Unionist party's energy spokesman, said that he would accept that Northern Ireland Electricity should be privatised, with strong regulatory bodies and an elected member, or members, to protect the consumer interest. Creeping acceptance of privatisation is to be regretted. There ought to be strong and united opposition to all aspects of that process.

My party considers that the privatisation of NIE as it stands represents the worst of both worlds. A privatised absolute monopoly would supply and distribute electricity in Northern Ireland. My party remains firm in its conviction, that, in the context of Northern Ireland, privatisation is wrong, not from any particular dogmatic political viewpoint—I see that the Minister smiles and laughs. We have already experienced disadvantage from lack of competition and real alternative sources of supply as a result of the privatisation of other industries. I refer in particular to telephones, to which the Minister referred earlier.

My party is also worried about the follow-on consequences of the order. We do not altogether accept the Minister's arguments.

Mr. Needham: Does the hon. Gentleman not welcome the fact that his constituents are paying 27 per cent. less for their telephone calls? Does he intend to continue to oppose the privatisation of Short Brothers plc and Harland and Woolf? Is the hon. Gentleman content that Northern Ireland Electricity should continue to be run as it was in the past, with all the problems that that meant for him and his party in the past and all that it means for him now? Is that what the hon. Gentleman is telling his constituents and the House?

Mr. McGrady: I have not yet completed my remarks, and I have made no reference whatsoever to my contentment or discontent with the present position. The Minister has jumped the gun.

The Minister has chosen to use two arguments in introducing the order. He says that it will introduce competition into the supply of fuel and into the cost of energy supply. He also says that it will be extremely beneficial to consumers, particularly to industrial consumers. I challenge both statements. If those twin pillars of his argument are knocked down, we are left with another translation of Tory dogma, as we had with health, social services and education from England, Scotland and Wales to Northern Ireland. Something that was tailored —or not tailored, as the case may be—for the rest of the United Kingdom does not fit the body politic in Northern Ireland. I fear that the same will be true of this order.

I am aware of the many deficiencies and inefficiencies and of the political interference in NIE's current arrangements. The people I represent and I myself will never forget the withdrawal of electricity from our homes, especially from the homes of the sick and the elderly, and from industry, in furtherance of a plot to overthrow the legitimate Government of Northern Ireland at that time. That policy and action was aided and abetted by all those employed at Northern Ireland Electricity, from the very top to the very bottom. I refer to the withdrawal of power in 1974 during the workers' strike. It was attempted again, although it was an abortive attempt, a couple of years later.

I have every reason to be conscious of the sectarian employment practices in Northern Ireland Electricity. Sectarian manipulation of practices went on, and continues to go on, in the allocation of contracts. These practices have gone on for the last 18 years, and beyond, but Northern Ireland has been under direct rule for 18 years. Despite these grave misgivings and concerns, and despite the inefficiencies to which the Minister so often referred, we still oppose the order.

It is alleged that the Minister's twin-pillar approach will bring down prices and, consequently, benefit the consumer. The Minister admits that there can be no competition in the transmission, distribution and supply of energy. That is already on the record. The public company that will be established under the order will be a total monopoly. It will be the interface between the consumer and the electricity generator. Nobody else will be concerned. Northern Ireland consumers will be unable to obtain a supply from a competitor. That applies to industrialists and single householders.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows that I did not say that. I have stated all along that it will take time to bring about competition, and that it will not be easy. However, I can think of a large number of cases where we have introduced competition into supply—for example, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. What I said was that, to start with, there is no immediate means by which competition can be introduced into supply. That is not, however, the Government's long-term ambition, which the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well.

Mr. McGrady: At no point tonight, or in Committee, has the Minister suggested that the Government intend to set up a rival public company to deal with transmission, distribution and supply.

Mr. Needham: If the hon. Gentleman reads carefully the documents that are in the public domain, he will note that there is such a thing as a second-tier supplier. We shall not set up new supplying organisations; in time, existing purchasers will be able to buy direct from the generator or the interconnector, rather than going through TDS.

Mr. McGrady: The Minister seems to be saying that certain people will be able to bypass TDS and buy directly from the generator. Will only those who are big and powerful enough to negotiate a direct supply be able to do that? I am concerned about the farmer and the householder in my constituency, who will not have the financial might to negotiate a separate deal personally. A parallel can be drawn with British Telecom. There is no separate supply in Northern Ireland; we have no choice. In such circumstances, the consumer is the victim of whatever whim or fancy is imposed by a large company at any time.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He cannot say that he is opposed to the idea of TDS as a monopoly supplier, and then protest when I tell him that that is not necessarily the case—that, for instance, the hospitals and the Housing Executive could buy direct, thus forcing down prices and introducing competition. What does the hon. Gentleman want?

Mr. McGrady: The Minister misrepresents what I am saying. Whatever it buys, the Housing Executive cannot send an electricity unit down the line to one house at one price, while an individual sends it to another house at another price—unless two people living side by side are to bear separate costs, simply because of the might of negotiation.

It is suggested that, because shareholders in the monopoly plc might be Northern Ireland residents, that might make everything all right. As I pointed out to the Minister in the Committee, however, the needs and desires of shareholders are diametrically opposed to those of consumers: the two groups are on opposite sides of the financial argument. The shareholder wishes to maximise profits, and that is done by means of efficiency and price structures. Efficiency should, we hope, help the consumer, but price structures will prevent the supply of low-cost energy.

The Minister argues that it is necessary to establish a privatised company to achieve many of the benefits that he mentioned in his opening speech. He cited the "green" environmental issue, with all that that entails; improved efficiency, with better business and production methods; alternative fuels; and the "profit and prices" syndrome. Given proper professional supervision and expertise, all those goals should have been achieved over the years by NIE in its present form, with the guidance of the Department of Economic Development.

Why, then, were they not achieved? The answer must be that the Department does not contain people with the professionalism, expertise and strength of character to provide the necessary instruction, and exercise the required control. The blame does not lie entirely with NIE, although it must shoulder some of that blame; in some measure, the blame must lie with the overseeing Department, which did not force the company along the admirable paths which—or so we are told—privatisation, with all its history, will now voluntarily embrace.

Mr. Needham: As the hon. Gentleman must know perfectly well—and would know even better if events in 1974 had allowed him to sit where I am sitting—my civil servants, admirable though they are, are not professional power workers, station managers or technicians. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman did not mean to criticise them. They, like the Minister they serve, must take advice from professionals within NIE. Unlike the new system, a public monopoly is not open to transparent regulations; the advice that is given is, to say the least, parti pris. The hon. Gentleman clearly wishes to continue with exactly the same system that led to the problems of 1974, and left us with an electricity system that is not as efficient as it ought to be.

Mr. McGrady: I did not say what the Minister has suggested I said. I said that all the aims to which he refers could and should have been achieved through proper supervision of the Department. The Minister can point to the civil servants if he wishes, but I do not expect any of them to be professionals. In every other walk of life, the Government bring in advisers. I am sure that that the Minister has played a part in the appointment of members of the board of NIE—people of character, substance and experience, who allegedly know all about business and represent the best of Northern Ireland expertise. They—let alone the civil servants—should have been able to run the industry with the consumer, efficiency, the green policy and alternative fuels in mind.

Mr. Beggs: Both NIE and the Department of Economic Development have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on consultants' reports. Were those reports worthless?

Mr. McGrady: I am not in a position to say; but they either did not have the desired effect or—if they were worth while—simply were not implemented. That question must now lie with the investigative bodies that control NIE.

Mr. Mallon: May I highlight a crucial point in the interesting exchange between my hon. Friend and the Minister? It all seems, more or less, to boil down to choice. Those who are critical of the efficiency standards of the electricity service in Northern Ireland must, it appears, favour privatisation—yet many of us are strongly critical of that service, while simultaneously believing that privatisation was not the way to deal with the problem.

Mr. McGrady: My hon. Friend, with his usual clarity and logic, has helped me to make the point that I was trying, without much success, to get across.

I want to come now to the question of generation and to the introduction of competition in respect of price. The argument can be distilled into two points. In other words, it is alleged that competition will arise on two fronts—between companies using the same fuel, and between companies using different fuels. If we are to believe all that we are told, there will be multiple competition in this area, leading to really competitive prices fo the consumer. However, this matter must be considered against the backcloth of the reality in Northern Ireland, which has a limited population—1·5 million—scattered throughout an area where accessibility varies.

In previous debates on this matter, the Minister has said that the supply company will buy from the generating company that provides energy most cheaply. Apparently it is anticipated that the supply company wil buy on a day-to-day basis, switching from one company to another according to prevailing prices. It seems to me that that is a particularly simple—I almost used the word "naive"—interpretation of what I think will happen in practice. The Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy referred to long-term contracts up the year 2024.

In the context of meaningful contracts that set out time spans and guarantees, will this day-to-day switching be possible? Notwithstanding my puzzlement in respect of this matter, the Minister, at the second meeting of the Committee, on 13 June, said:

"The basis of the scheme is that the transmission, distribution and supply company, a separate, publicly floated company subject to regulation and with a consumer council interest, will itself determine the merit order, of fuels from which it draws down power. If, for example, gas is cheaper today, lignite tomorrow, oil the day after and coal the day after that, competition will draw down the cheapest fuel being generated in Northern Ireland. That is why we have separated the generators from the transmission, distribution and supply business. The regulator is there to ensure that the fuel drawn down is the cheapest."

My interpretation may be entirely wrong, but I find it extremely difficult to envisage someone daily standing by a switch and deciding that, as company B is selling fuel at a lower price than company A, a transfer should be made from company A to company B. That is exactly what will

happen. The Minister must have in mind some massive financial incentive to keep all the potential suppliers in production and on standby for a draw-down of power when their prices hit the bottom.

Mr. Needham: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman finds this all so complicated. Under the purchasing power agreement, there is an availability payment to ensure that stations will be available to generators. In terms of the merit order, indeed, that has to be the case at present. Then there will be an additional payment for burn. How will it be decided which company should be taken on to burn? That will depend on what is the cheapest fuel source on the day. If individual generators can secure fuel more cheaply from the sources available to them, they will get a higher pecking position in the merit order. Right from the start, that introduces an element of competition into the generating side. That can be done only by separating the generators, which is exactly what the Select Committee suggested we ought to do. That is how it will work.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the Minister for his explanation. I must take his word for it that there will be a number of generators supplying the Northern Ireland grid and that a generator can be switched off without any warning.

In his evidence to the Northern Ireland Committee, the Minister went on:

"The regulator will insist that the transmission, distribution and supply company will buy at the cheapest price wherever possible."

It will be mandatory, under the direction of the regulator, for the supply company to draw down the cheapest price available on the day. The commercial arrangements that the Minister hopes will be put in place to enable that instant, day-to-day—or even part-day—transfer to take place will be extremely complex. The Minister will forgive me if I show some scepticism about the matter. I shall leave it and see what history tells us.

The Minister told the Northern Ireland Committee:

"there will be an incentive built into the contract with the transmission, distribution and supply company for the licence from the regulator to ensure that the transmission, distribution and supply company cannot just pass on the full costs of the generation for which it has been charged by the generators."

Again it is a question of what is the right price, what is the quantum of the incentive, who pays, and to whom.

The Minister referred to a second incentive when he said:

"A further incentive will be built into the transmission, distribution and supply company, so that it does not try to improve its profits by increasing its sale of electricity. We want to ensure that we are energy efficient and that we are doing the best that we can in the interests of conservation for the people of Northern Ireland. We shall be building competition into the system from the start."—[*Official Report*, Northern Ireland Committee, 13 June 1991; cc. 51-2.]

The point being made there is that the TDS company should not take advantage of decreasing costs to improve profits. In terms of a public liability company making a profit on behalf of its shareholders, those are very pious, if impractical, thoughts. I do not believe that they will be put into effect. The normal conflict will always arise from the desire to maximise profits for the benefit of shareholders.

Mr. Needham: That is exactly why we need strong regulation. In this regard, I agree with the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs). The regulation will be transparent. All this will be open to scrutiny by the public. If the TDS company exceeds its prognosis for a given year, it will have to put its extra profit back in the following year. Through lower prices, it will have to ensure that it does not maximise its profits by over-supply. Surely the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a better way of proceeding than the present opaque, monopolistic, publicly owned system, which he rightly accepts—on this matter, he and I do not disagree—is just not doing the job that it ought to do.

Mr. McGrady: The question that brought the Minister to his feet will have to be answered in the winding-up speech. I asked what was the anticipated quantum amount of the two incentives to which he has referred—the incentive built into the contract with the TDS, and the further incentive to prevent the TDS from increasing its profits or sales. Who pays what, to whom, and for how long?

I fear that, if I were asked to gaze into a crystal ball with regard to electricity supply in Northern Ireland, I should see a rapidly developing situation in which energy was supplied entirely by one undertaking. That supplier might be outside Northern Ireland. Generating capacity in Northern Ireland from coal, gas, oil or lignite might eventually be put out of business. We in Northern Ireland might lose our capacity to generate our own energy. We might then be totally at the mercy of outside suppliers. We would have little or no control over the prices, just as we have little or no control over prices with respect to any of the other nationalised industries.

I do not believe that competing fuels will lead to massive competition. The Minister must bear in mind an important financial factor: it is argued that alternative fuels will contribute massively to keeping prices down, but the Minister's Department has stated that only 30 per cent. of the cost of electricity is related to the fuel that is used. Therefore, any variation in price in terms of fuel is only in respect of one third of the cost of supply.

Any cost advantage from competing fuels would only affect one third of the cost. Under the new set-up, there would be shareholder pressure and capital investment pressures. Such a small reduction of one third would be swamped by price increases. That is why my party and I are completely opposed to the privatisation process. We strongly urge that the generation of energy in Northern Ireland should be kept in the public sector, but with much greater involvement of the Northern Ireland Office, with more professional direction and more consumer protection.

All the efficiencies and the accomplishments that the Minister claims will be achieved under privatisation, can be and should have been achieved by the existing organisation. This is not a massive monolith. The company is of a size that could be and should be suitably managed. We will vote against the order this evening.

7.2 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): The Minister would be disappointed if I did not make my normal objection about the Order-in-Council procedure being used in respect of the orders. The draft Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 has 95 articles and 14 schedules. It is not good enough for the Minister to argue that three sittings of the Northern Ireland Committee and 12 weeks for consultation are sufficient to replace the First and Second Readings, Committee stage, Report and Third

[Mr. Clifford Forsythe]

Reading which the House normally gives such a proposal. Amendments can be tabled in Committee or on the Floor of the House and when an argument is won—as it is occasionally—it can be used to alter that legislation.

The orders are important because they privatise a Northern Ireland asset which is essential for everyone. They will be pushed through the House by hon. Members who have not been in the Chamber during our debate. The Minister commented on Northern Ireland Members, but he should bear in mind that the hon. Members who will vote for the orders were not in the Chamber when he made his speech. The orders will be approved regardless of any mistakes of content or policy. If anything, that is more disgraceful than what happened to the education order, which was completely opposed by every Northern Ireland Member but which became law regardless of that opposition.

The Minister missed a unique opportunity. Despite the continued assertion of the Northern Ireland Office that, if cross-community support is achievable, the Northern Ireland Office and the Government will concede the point, that does not happen.

The 95 articles and 14 schedules are subdivided into 173 paragraphs with innumerable sub-paragraphs and sub-articles. It is obvious that much more time for examination should have been given to the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order. That could have been achieved if the measure had been introduced in the House by way of a Bill.

I never cease to marvel that this process is permitted in the House—in this mother of democracies. I am amazed that hon. Members can allow that to happen. The Minister failed to convince me that privatisation is the right way forward for Northern Ireland Electricity. I do not believe that the price of electricity will be reduced for my constituents. The contrived splitting of the service will not create the competition which the Minister is seeking and which is essential to prove the Minister's point that privatisation will be for the good of electricity consumers in Northern Ireland.

It is illogical that a company which is at present publicly owned and under the Minister's control should be able to provide cheaper electricity for consumers if it is handed over to a private company which will seek continually to improve its profit margins—if it does not do that, the shareholders will want to know why. A company with a group of consumers who are dependent on it for their supply is no great support for the Minister's case.

If, in the years that the Minister and other Conservative Ministers have run Northern Ireland Electricity—albeit at arm's length—with full control of all aspects of Northern Ireland Electricity, they had discovered faults in the running of NEI, who should have corrected those faults? Who else, other than the Minister, would have been capable of calling the board to account for that money? Who else could have improved the lot of consumers in Northern Ireland?

When the Minister and his colleagues made decisions about oil and about electricity generation in Northern Ireland, why did they not make the great plans that we hear about in the House, in Committee and in the newspapers? If they had done that, the benefits would have already gone to Northern Ireland electricity consumers. At least we have a little time to debate the matter and to put forward our points of view. From our experience in other Committees, the Minister and I know that we could talk until the early hours of tomorrow morning or Wednesday morning and it would not make any difference to the net result.

Article 33(1) states that the

"Department may appoint competent and impartial persons to be electrical inspectors under this Part."

What qualifications will the electrical inspectors have? Will they have a general electrical background such as that of an electrician, or will the narrow terms specified in article 33(2)(a) and (b) apply? Article 33(2)(c) uses the words:

"to inspect and test, if and when required by any consumer, any such lines and plant on the consumer's premises".

Incidentally, the consumer will be charged. The fee that is paid to the electrical inspector will be paid to the Department. When will that provision be used? Article 88(1) states:

"The Department may, with the approval of the Department of Finance and Personnel, make grants to Northern Ireland Electricity of such amounts as the Department thinks fit towards such expenditure incurred by Northern Ireland Electricity during its transitional period as is not met under Schedule 13 by such of its successor companies as may be designated by or under the transfer scheme."

Will the Minister explain that article? In what circumstances will it operate?

When we discussed another order relating to the tourist board's annual report, the Minister said that we would have the board's report within three months. Article 53 states that there will be an annual report. Will the Minister tell us what time scale he has in mind for that report to become available? Will three months be too soon, or will the period be six months?

Under paragraph 11 of schedule 4, matters can be referred to the Lands Tribunal. In my constituency there are difficulties with the Lands Tribunal. It can be quite expensive for a property owner to insist that a dispute goes to the Lands Tribunal. On occasions, it appeared that some were deliberately steered in the direction of the Lands Tribunal because it was felt in the Department that the Lands Tribunal would find against the landowner, even when the landowner seemed to be right. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that point.

Schedule 4 contains wide-ranging powers—for example, in paragraph 14—which operate to the disadvantage of the landowner. The company is entitled to go on to his or her land and, in certain circumstances, insist that certain things be done. An advantage is being given to the company. The Minister will not be able to change that. However, if we had been considering a Bill, an amendment could have been tabled.

Under paragraph 15 of schedule 4, if there is a dispute the Department could interfere. Will the Minister state the circumstances in which the Department could interfere? In certain circumstances, the Department is the final arbiter. Is it possible for the landowner or the person concerned to go beyond the Department? In the past, we have not found it satisfactory to allow a Department to be the final arbiter.

The Minister said that the Housing Executive could take its own supply of electricity. Am I to assume that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will be capable of taking electricity to supply its estates? Will it use the existing infrastructure, the mains, cables and so on to do that?

Mr. Needham: I said to the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) that there is no reason to suppose that, at some time in the future, it will not be possible to bring in supply competition. For example, it would be perfectly possible for the Housing Executive, if it so wanted on behalf of its tenants, to undertake a contract direct with the generators. The electricity would have to go down the wires of the transmission company, but the accounts for the transmission element would be separate from those for the supply side. Therefore, it would be perfectly possible to work out what element of the cost relates to the use of the wires and what element should be shared directly between the Housing Executive and the generator. There should be no problem with that, provided that the two sets of accounts are kept separately by the TDS company.

Mr. Forsythe: If this had been a Committee debate, I might have debated that point with the Minister, but I will not do so now, because you, Madam Deputy Speaker, would rightly call me to order if I did.

I am interested in schedule 11, not only because it relates to pensions but because it has given rise to many questions that I should like to put to the Minister. I refer to the "power to amend" of paragraph 2 of schedule 11, which states:

"Regulations may make provision amending—

(a) the trust deed of the scheme for the purpose of enabling the trustees to amend any provision of that trust deed".

As one who serves on the Select Committee on Social Security, which has been looking at pensions of all descriptions, it has been my experience, having heard the evidence given to that Committee, that it is dangerous to give a "power to amend" when transferring a scheme from one company to another. There is no doubt that, although the intention of the power to amend may simply be to amend what is in the scheme to enable it to become part of a new company, the power to amend allows the company to amend the scheme in whatever way it thinks fit, provided that that does not disadvantage those who are already receiving a pension or who may do so in the future.

Will that power to amend cease as soon as the regulations are in force? Will the company cease being able to amend the scheme once the scheme comes under the company's control? Has there been any actuarial assessment of the present NIE pension scheme? Who carried out any such assessment? What is the name of the scheme's present actuary? Will the members of the scheme who are employees of the new company be entitled to withdraw their share of the scheme and to take out a personal pension instead of becoming members of the new occupational scheme? If there has not yet been any actuarial assessment, when will that take place and when will the results be made public?

A very important question about any pension fund or scheme is: what will happen to any surplus in that fund or scheme? I should have asked the Minister whether there is a surplus, but if the fund has not been actuarially assessed, we cannot know. I ask about a surplus, bearing in mind paragraph 23 of the seventh report of the Select Committee on Public Accounts, entitled "Privatisation of Harland and Wolff", which states:

"We note that the Department's advisers put a value of £12·5 million on the pension fund surplus, which had been contributed indirectly from public funds. The Heads of Agreement envisaged the Department receiving all except £2 million of this surplus but the final position gave the new company the totality of any surplus subject to restrictions on £6·5 million of it. We recognise that the fund trustees had put a value of only £4·5 million on the surplus but we expect that, in due course, the taxpayer will benefit from the H & W pension fund surplus to an amount of £6·5 million, whether by way of repayment from MEBO/Olsen or by abatement of aid from public funds towards vessel construction."

The crucial statement is the next sentence, which reads:

"Any amount of surplus over £6·5 million will clearly accrue to the company."

The report's findings show why it is important that the surplus of any fund relating to the NIE should be investigated carefully, reported on to the House or made public.

I should like to ask the Minister about the practicalities of transferring the scheme. Will the pension scheme finances be divided 50:50 between the two new companies —one on the generation side and one on the supply side? If more than one new company is formed on the generation side, will the 50 per cent. that is to be transferred to the generation side be divided between the companies that will form that generation side, including any surplus——

Mr. John D. Taylor: And in what proportion?

Mr. Forsythe: One of my right hon. Friends has prompted me to ask, "And in what proportion?"

I hope that I have given the Minister sufficient food for thought, and that he will either answer those questions or undertake to write to us about them.

Finally, I refer to a document that the Minister sent me and my colleagues. It explains various points about the order. Appendix 2 relates to proposals not resulting in changes to the draft order. Comment (a) states:

"The Department is likely to require the PES, by means of an order, to ensure that its tariffs do not vary from one part of Northern Ireland to another."

Why is the wording "is likely", not "shall"? Why is the Department "likely" to require the PES to do that? Surely the word should be "shall". Indeed, I hope that it will be "shall", although that is not what the order states.

I draw the Minister's attention to article 19(2). Will the Minister estimate the maximum amount of power that would be required for any of his dwellings? Even if members of the general public know a little about electricity, it is difficult for them to estimate the load required for a house. It appears that, if people cannot estimate it themselves, they will have to pay to have that done. The Minister is trying to protect consumers in Northern Ireland and, by means of competition, reduce the tariff. It would be extremely unfair to ask them to pay out more money. Perhaps the Minister will make that point clear.

I also draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 1(1)(a) of schedule 9. Where a company has to publish a statement about guarding the environment and so on, will any work in connection with it be allowed to start before the statement is available? Will the statement be made public? The companies will be given 12 months to issue a statement. How long after the 12 months have elapsed will the statement be published? Will the Minister explain what the schedule means when it says that the statement can be modified? What occasion could arise that would require the statement to be modified? Will the statement be available to the general public and not simply published for internal purposes?

The Minister will be glad to hear that I am coming to the end of my specific points. Paragraph 2 of schedule 10

[Mr. Forsythe]

refers to an arbitrator for certain disputes. Who will that arbitrator be? Will he or she be in the legal profession, or will it be someone from the electricity generation business?

Time will tell whether the Minister's confidence that there will be lower electricity prices in Northern Ireland is justified. Having gone to the sharp end of the discussion and taken up that stance, the Minister will realise that he will be criticised if his forecasts are wrong.

It is hard to understand why the citizens of Northern Ireland are being prevented from participating in buying shares in the generation side of the industry. I go further: it is disgraceful that those citizens who regard Northern Ireland electricity as one of their industries are excluded from share ownership. I have not been convinced by the Minister's arguments. With the rest of my colleagues, I shall vote against the order this evening.

7.33 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): One of the difficulties about the order is that we face a choice between a quango and the unknown. The Minister put it in succinct terms when he referred to the Northern Ireland Electricity Service for which he held little or no brief. The service is a quango. The Minister's statement was very telling indeed. He made the essential point that the Northern Ireland Office could not control the quango and, despite its efforts—I accept that those efforts were genuine—could not turn the service into an effective organisation.

By implication, we have a choice between supporting a body such as Northern Ireland Electricity and supporting privatisation. The service is failed, as the Minister clearly told us. He told us about the enormous debts that had accrued. He told us that the service was not amenable to the Department. Yet the alternative is the imponderable of a privatisation process within which there are great potential difficulties.

Given that the order will be a fait accompli tonight, we must make sure that we do one fundamental thing. The Minister said that—I hope that I quote him verbatim—for the first time, the playing field will be level. Unfortunately, the deficiencies in the Northern Ireland electricity service mean that the playing field is not, and has never been, level. In one major patch of my constituency the electricity infrastructure is such that it is impossible for people to be confident that they will have a supply of electricity.

For example, for the past five Christmases there has been no electricity. I know of one lady who told me that only this Christmas her turkey was cooking in the oven on Christmas day when out went the lights and there was no electricity in the entire area. I spoke to her later that day. Another lady came into my office as recently as last Friday and recounted an incident. She was caring for her disabled son when the electricity went off for a stretch of 10 hours. Her problem was how to give her son the type of care that he should have had.

It is not simply that if one opposes privatisation one supports the Northern Ireland electricity service. If the order is to go through—as it will—we must get the playing field level. I ask the Minister as the person now responsible to ensure that a proper structural system of electricity supply exists in the part of Armagh ranging from Camlough to Mullaghbawn so that people do not face day in and day out the problems that I have described.

The problem is not simply the lights going off in people's houses. Milking machines in milking parlours throughout the area, fax machines and computers go off and the infrastructure of the area suffers greatly. Why does it happen in Armagh? I want the Minister to answer that question.

Is any old thing good enough for south Armagh? Is the service that I have described good enough for south Armagh? I have asked that question of the electricity service and I ask it again of the Minister. The facts are there. The Northern Ireland Office can find out the number of times that the electricity service has failed, the length of time that it took to re-establish it and the problems that it caused. That is all a matter of record. The question is what type of body allowed that position to develop. What attitude in the organisation allowed it to continue? What is the attitude in the Northern Ireland electricity service and in the Northern Ireland Office? How will the Department ensure that the playing field is level before the change takes place? If that structural change is not made, I have no doubt whatever that we shall face the further problem that those who become involved for profit will not replace the infrastructure properly.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): It is not only the hon. Gentleman's constituency which suffers. One part of the town of Coleraine suffers from very low voltage due to the enormous amount of building which is taking place; equipment has not been upgraded to take care of it. He need not think that his constituents are being discriminated against, as it seems to be universal.

Mr. Mallon: I thank the hon. Member for that information and shall rephrase my question. What is wrong with south Armagh, Coleraine and all the other places in the north of Ireland where, having had the ball at its own feet for so many years, the quango called the Northern Ireland electricity service has not been able to provide a structure to carry electricity in the way that we have come to expect in this day and age and should be able to expect as we near the end of the century?

I am not pleased that there is a problem in Coleraine, but I am delighted to hear that the problem is not peculiar to my constituency, and it is all the more reprehensible that it has not been dealt with.

Problems exist in three areas. Last week I met representatives of the Northern Ireland electricity service, who told me that monitoring equipment would be obtained quickly. I have a strong suspicion that the speed had something to do with this debate. I look forward to seeing the monitoring equipment in operation next week and I shall be looking out for it.

As we near the end of the century, I should have thought that immediate maintenance would be a matter of course, not something that we must wait another two months for, but that is the time scale. However, the most important matter is the replacement of lines. I asked when I might expect that to take place. No commitment could or would be given. Will that be put back until the change takes place? Will the playing field be made level? Irrespective of monitoring equipment or maintenance, unless new lines are installed the problem will not be solved.

Let us make the playing field level and do so in such a way that, whatever the problems of privatisation—and there will be problems—at least every household can be

confident that it will have an electricity supply at all times, barring the occasional accident, which could happen anywhere. At least people in industry and in farming will be able to rely on the supply to continue their activities. At least we could then cope with the difficulties resulting from privatisation. The reality is that the Northern Ireland electricity service has failed the people of the north of Ireland.

There was another way to deal with the problem and I was surprised by the Minister's approach. Normally he does not back away from facing up to a problem. Was it not possible to kick the industry into shape? Was it not possible to tell it that it could not continue with the practices that it had used in the past? Did we have to dive into the unknown in such a way that we may have to deal with the same problems in the future but with people responsible for the problems who will not even be as amenable to direction as the Northern Ireland electricity industry should and could have been.

Another detail of crucial importance in a rural constituency is the lack of three-phase electricity cables. They simply do not exist in many areas, which means that small or light industries, which are often placed in farming communities to deal with work on farming machinery, cannot operate. Without three-phase cables, they lack the voltage to carry out the work. Why are such cables not in place in farming communities? Why does that huge gap exist throughout the north of Ireland, not merely in my constituency?

Representatives of the Northern Ireland electricity service should have been asked those questions when they were lobbying on this order. Those are the questions being asked by people in the community.

While the Northern Ireland community is no great advocate of privatisation and is concerned about its possible effects, it sheds no tears about the fact that the Northern Ireland electricity service will not continue in its present form.

The Minister referred to a remark made by the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), who said, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." I agree with that. By and large, I do not believe in tampering with something that works. However, the industry is broken because of its debt, because it has not provided an adequate service, because of its attitude to the Government and the community and because it did not do what any publicly appointed body should have done. It did not ensure that it was effective and efficient and that it dealt with the entire community in the way that any public body should.

The Minister mentioned that the Housing Executive might be able to buy electricity direct as a result of privatisation. I now realise why the Housing Executive recently spent millions of pounds on group heating schemes only to turn round a few short months later, abandon them and introduce new schemes based on Economy 7 electricity. I could not understand why. I tabled parliamentary questions and wrote to the Housing Executive and to the Minister. Now the penny has dropped—it was part of the pre-planning for the new electricity supply.

How could the Housing Executive or the Department otherwise justify spending hundreds of thousands of pounds in one month on group electricity schemes and knock on people's doors two months later saying, "Sorry —we made a mistake; we're going to do it differently. We're going to rip it out and put in electric heaters"? That is what happened. If the Minister is sceptical, I refer him to what happened in North street flats in Newry. It happened, and it is on record. It also happened in other places, and now I think I know why.

I fear what may happen as a result of privatisation. Probably in the initial stages it will be prevented, because the present Minister is proactive in such matters and a close eye will be kept on the situation and every effort made to ensure that what he has committed himself to is delivered. However, there will come a time when accountability will cease—it will give way to profitability. Once that happens, the people of the north of Ireland will once again have been the victims of experimentation which is what I believe this privatisation to be.

Why cannot the north of Ireland be like other places and not have to suffer those difficulties? Hon. Members have stressed that the economy of scale and size of the north of Ireland are such that it is probable that lack of accountability will come into the system there long before it happens in other areas.

Privatisation is an unfortunate choice. The Northern Ireland electricity service should have been done away with—it should have been restructured in such a way that the defects could have been dealt with. That would have been a better alternative to what is being offered in the order. I should like to think that at least the full weight of Government influence has gone into restructuring a body which could have coped adequately, before taking a risk which we will probably all have to pay dearly for.

7.49 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I think that I can help you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House by formally adopting what has been said by Northern Ireland Members, particularly by my hon. Friends the Members for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) and for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs). I would, indeed, waste the time of the House if I repeated all the arguments that have been advanced with such force today.

I am disappointed that so few Members are in the Chamber for a debate which is so important for the people of Northern Ireland. I am surprised that so few Members have been present throughout the entire debate.

I was interested in what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said about central heating in Housing Executive homes in his constituency. I got the impression from his remarks that the Housing Executive was tearing out existing heating systems and installing Economy 7. I have many constituents in Housing Executive homes who are desperately waiting for any central heating, whether Economy 7 or any other. Therefore, I appeal to the Government to urge the Housing Executive to think of the people of North Down who are living in public sector housing and need to have their heating system uprated.

I wish to use this opportunity to protest once again at the wholly discredited system of introducing Northern Ireland legislation by Order in Council. It is undemocratic and to the discredit of the Government that they continue to use this system, despite continuing complaints from Northern Ireland Members. We have protested time after time throughout the lifetime of this Government since the abolition of the Stormont Parliament and, subsequently,

[Mr. James Kilfedder]

the abolition of the Stormont Assembly that was brought disgracefully to an end two months before its legislative demise.

I regret that the Government have not responded sympathetically to our appeals for the restoration of democracy to the people of Northern Ireland. If legislation for Northern Ireland were introduced in the form of a Bill, we, like hon. Members who represent other parts of the United Kingdom, would be able to move amendments to alter and improve it. In my time in this House, I know of no piece of legislation that has not benefited from amendments tabled by hon. Members on both sides of the House. In this day and age, it is a disgrace that the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity is introduced by Order in Council. We are being denied a fundamental right.

When I look at what is happening in eastern Europe, where communism is being replaced by a democratic system, I wonder when democracy will be brought to Northern Ireland. Under communism, one had the right only to vote for or aginst a measure. With an Order in Council we have that same right of the totalitarian states either to vote for a measure or to reject it. The people of Northern Ireland are entitled to have the fundamental right that is bestowed on all people and their represenatives throughout the democratic world. In the dying days of this Parliament, I challenge the Government to meet the rights of the people, to restore democracy to Northern Ireland and to give power back to the people.

As the Minister told us, this matter was debated in the Northern Ireland Committee. That was not of any great benefit to hon. Members from the Province. I never asked for it to be debated there. Any debate that takes place in that Committee is a charade. Indeed, I said so when the Committee first debated the privatisation of NIE. It merely means that the Government can say, as the Minister said in his opening speech tonight, that Northern Ireland Members had an opportunity of discussing the electricity privatisation. We know that whatever we said, it was of no account to the Government. They showed their contempt for the people of Northern Ireland by rejecting the unanimous opinion of the representatives of those people.

As has been said, it is not often that Northern Ireland constitutional politicians get together, but we are certainly united in our opposition to this measure. There must be something wrong when the Government reject such a united appeal. The Government and political commentators often say that whenever it is possible to get unanimity among Northern Ireland constitutional politicians, the Government will back them in the Chamber. During our debates on the privatisation of NIE, we have achieved unanimity, as we have tonight, but the Government will bring in the payroll vote—their Lobby fodder—to ensure that, no matter what the people of Northern Ireland may say through their representatives, the Order in Council will be passed. There may not be many Members present in the Chamber, but once the Division bell rings, they will emerge from the smoking room, the bars, the tea room and elsewhere to pass this legislation.

It is worth underlining a few points that have already been made. As I have mentioned, the Northern Ireland Committee is worthless. Over the years, I have repeatedly asked for a Select Committee on Northern Ireland. I know that other Northern Ireland Members have also made that request. That would give us power. We could call before such a Select Committee Ministers, civil servants and experts in the particular subject under discussion. We could sit at Westminster and in Northern Ireland. I am not asking for anything remarkable, because we already have a Select Committee on Energy, which has considered this matter. We have Select Committees on Scottish Affairs and on the Environment.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I must correct the hon. Member. The Select Committee on Scottish Affairs has not met during this Parliament, because the Tories cannot supply enough people to man it. There are only nine Tory Members from Scotland, five of whom are in the Government. Therefore, Scotland has been denied a Select Committee, so we have fellow feelings with our colleagues from Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kilfedder: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that information. A Select Committee has been appointed for Scotland even though it has not met for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman gave. We have not even got the shadow of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland, and that is what we want. Nothing would give the people of Northern Ireland more pleasure than to have a Select Committee sitting in Northern Ireland—perhaps at Stormont, Bangor, Antrim——

Mr. Mallon: Or in Dublin?

Mr. Kilfedder: I will not take up that suggestion, but perhaps the Committee could sit in Armagh. There is a need for a Select Committee in Dublin to examine the political shenanigans that are going on there now. However, as a representative of the people of Northern Ireland, I shall not interfere in the affairs of a foreign state, and it would be wrong to do so. From the press it seems that there is a need for a searching inquiry into every branch of government in the Irish Republic. However, that is not a matter for me, nor for this debate.

I am not hung up on political ideology and I am not opposed to privatisation. In fact, I supported the privatisation of the electricity for England and that shows I am perfectly fair in my approach to the subject. However, I have heard nothing from the Minister, or in the Northern Ireland Committee or read anything since to suggest that the proposed privatisation of NIE will benefit domestic or commercial customers by reducing prices to the lower ones which exist in Great Britain.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Whenever things go wrong in Northern Ireland, people have a right to complain. More often than not, they go to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Northern Ireland, who is a wonderful lady doing a wonderful job. She often gets complaints about the electricity industry. I wonder what she thinks about the proposed privatisation. That lady comes over here because she is answerable to Parliament through the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, but it does not have an hon. Member from Northern Ireland serving on it. It should have, so that the people of Northern Ireland can be represented properly.

Mr. Kilfedder: I am not surprised to hear such eloquence from the hon. Member. He always inspires me when I hear him and I regret that he will be leaving Parliament in a few weeks when the next election takes place. We will miss him: I say sincerely, I would call him my hon. Friend. Whenever one needs advice, one can always go to Frank and he will help.

The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) has emphasised a point which I should not have overlooked. Many hon. Members from Northern Ireland try to get on to Select Committees—we may not have a Select Committee on Northern Ireland, but we try to get on to others—but sufficient places are denied us. We have one hon. Member on the Select Committee on Health and the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) is a member of the Select Committee on Social Security—the Committee that tried to get the Maxwell brothers to speak before it.

Mr. Harry Barnes: The Energy Select Committee, whose report we are discussing tonight, also has no member from Northern Ireland on it. That report dealt with the privatisation of NIE. If there is a Committee in which someone from Northern Ireland should have exercised their judgment as well as giving evidence, surely it should have been the one producing that report.

Mr. Kilfedder: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It proves what I said. There ought to be a Select Committee on Northern Ireland which could have gone into the matter in great detail. Sadly, that did not happen, and as a result we are faced with the draft order, which may not be beneficial to the people of Northern Ireland.

Electricity prices in Northern Ireland have gone up a great deal recently and I fear that those increases were dictated by the approaching privatisation. They were pushed up deliberately to make privatisation much more attractive. As a result, the people of Northern Ireland have suffered.

The order proposes to replace a public sector monopoly with a private sector one. I want some reassurance from the Government on an issue that worries me greatly and I am sure that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will do his best to answer me. Every time a public sector concern has been privatised, the chairman suddenly finds he is worth more than he was paid before. That has happened with the privatisation of water and British Telecom, but there are other examples. Suddenly, the salaries of the chairmen have doubled or even quadrupled, and every year they are voted salary increases of hundreds of thousands. Those are obscene figures and they are offensive to me and everyone else in the Province.

Certainly I dread the prospect that with privatisation the chairman of NIE, whoever he may be, will suddenly be voted a salary as though he had just got a pot of gold at the end of the Irish rainbow. I warn the Government that if that happens, the people of Northern Ireland will be incensed.

Many people, some of whom are in my constituency, feel the burden of electricity prices. We must always remember the elderly. When I visit them in their homes, they may have one bar of an electric fire on while the wind is whistling around my ankles. When I suggest that they ought to turn on a second bar, they say that their bills are enormous. We must think of them when we debate this proposal. Are we pushing up their electricity prices, and will we make life more difficult for retired people in Northern Ireland?

I fear that, as a consequence of the proposal, no matter what promises the Government make and what happens in the next few months, electricity prices will go up and the people in Northern Ireland will suffer. When that happens, at least my hon. Friends and I will be able to say that we voted to oppose this proposal.

The increased electricity prices also punish commercial and industrial concerns in Northern Ireland. They are doing their best to compete with industries elsewhere, which are near their markets and where electricity prices may be cheaper. The industries concerned provide jobs for people in Northern Ireland and they should be encouraged. The price of electricity should be reduced to help them. Again, I fear that the order will not do that.

For many years, I have been asking for a pipeline to take natural gas from the gasfields of Great Britain to Northern Ireland. That would certainly introduce competition in energy supply. Such a pipeline would ensure a cheaper form of heating for homes as well as for industry in the Province, and we must have that as soon as possible. The Government may say that the pipeline is being introduced only because of privatisation, but it should have been created ages ago. I believe that the European Community would have supported it and will support it.

Mr. Beggs: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the length of time that Northern Ireland has been waiting for that gas pipeline. I am sure that he will agree that the former hon. Member for Upper Bann, the late Harold McCusker, fought a strenuous campaign throughout his time in this House for a proper gas supply to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kilfedder: I agree with my hon. Friend's comment.

The issue of energy conservation has always amazed me. Wherever I am in Northern Ireland, whether Bangor in the heart of my constituency or North Down or elsewhere, the street lights are on. I know that the time clock can go wrong, but surely it cannot go wrong that often. The phenomenon may be peculiar to Northern Ireland or it may apply to other parts of the United Kingdom, but something should be done for the sake of energy conservation to ensure that the lights do not burn away during daylight hours when the Government, through expensive advertisements, have been appealing to the public to save electricity. There is an onus on the Government and the electricity service, no matter who owns it, to ensure that electricity is not wasted during daylight hours.

8.13 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): I apologise to the House for arriving so late this afternoon, but it is rather more foggy in Northern Ireland today than it is in London. Unfortunately, one or two other matters also intervened. One should never try to read the Whips' minds when they are arranging business in the House. It makes life much easier if one intends to be present on Monday as well as every other day of the week.

The last two sentences of paragraph 55 of the Energy Select Committee's report say:

"We emphasise the need for Government to clarify matters such as these before pushing ahead with privatisation, and we

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recommend that the Secretary of State arrange detailed consultations with the Northern Ireland political parties before legislation is finalised. We hope that an absence of full and detailed debate by the House, our recommendations will be fully taken into account.

That is where a great deficit exists with regard to legislation for Northern Ireland. A full debate simply cannot take place in the context of the procedure that we are following this evening. We are all well aware of that. The deficit would be easily remedied. Indeed, it could have been remedied many years ago but unfortunately the Government, like their predecessors, have seen fit to ignore the remedy.

Consultation, which is such a large feature of government in Northern Ireland at every level, not only at parliamentary representation but also at council level, is an abomination. It gives the electorate the impression that their councillors and Members of Parliament are capable of getting changes made. But consultation is no substitute for proper debate in the House, and consultation at local government level is not and cannot ever be a substitute for democratic control. The Government should have remedied that a long time ago. As it is apparent that it will not be done in this Parliament, perhaps it will done in the next, because 23 years without it is far too long.

Throughout the debates that have taken place on the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity, many attacks have been made on past decisions by the Northern Ireland Electricity Service and its forerunners. I am old enough to remember electricity undertakings for Londonderry city and for Belfast city, which were quite successful and even made money at one stage. They were eventually swallowed up by Northern Ireland Electricity. All those decisions seemed to be the best at the time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) said that the Minister in charge of the Department that ran Northern Ireland Electricity could have improved standards in the company. There is no doubt about that. The Government use that means to control nearly everything else in Northern Ireland. It is quite simply a quango that is given responsibility. If the Government continue to use quangos to control the Housing Executive, health and social services, and nearly every local government and many central Government powers, there is no good reason why they should be willing to depart from them only in the case of Northern Ireland Electricity but cling to them to control everything else. That is quite astonishing: if the Minister stops to think about it, he will find it as astonishing as anyone else.

The attacks which Ministers have launched on Northern Ireland Electricity are not soundly based. The organisation has faced many problems throughout the years. It has the smallest market, totally isolated within Northern Ireland, to contend with. Given the size of modern generating units, that has made its job almost impossible in terms of economies of scale.

Most of the planning for the mess that has existed since the early 1970s was done in the 1950s and the 1960s because of the long lead time needed to create a generating plant. At that time, NIE had to make up its mind which fuel—not fuels—to use, and it naturally chose the cheapest. With hindsight, one can see that it was foolish to rely on oil, but that was before the oil shortage of the 1970s. Even in those days, although there were difficulties with the price of coal and miners' strikes, there were no real problems.

The Northern Ireland Government and the electricity service took what then seemed to them a logical decision and opted for a single fuel. There is always a danger in putting all one's eggs in one basket, but it was a reasonable decision at the time. There was also a rapidly expanding economy and a number of man-made fibre factories in Northern Ireland that needed enormous amounts of electricity. The decision makers faced an expanding economy and did not foresee that the development would come to a juddering halt.

In other parts of the United Kingdom, where many large undertakings in the heavy industry sector ceased, surplus electricity could be passed down the line from Scotland to England or wherever on the national grid, but there was no interconnector with Northern Ireland and all the projections relating to Northern Ireland Electricity were blown out of the water. No one could have foreseen all those events, and I resent some of the attacks that have been made on those who ran Northern Ireland Electricity and on the decisions they took. They were acting for the best at the time.

If an interconnector had been installed then—perhaps it was not technically possible, but I suspect it was—Kilroot and the rest might have been built. They were modern plants and could have succeeded if the interconnector had existed on a large enough scale, but it is not yet in place.

When considering the future of Northern Ireland, we must remember that it has an indigenous fuel. Fairly large amounts of lignite have been discovered which may eventually be used, even if they are not used now. We cannot have such a fuel and not use it. The United Kingdom has an indigenous fuel: coal. Despite the difficulties within the coal industry, we shall return to greater use of that fuel.

We shall always find a use for coal—perhaps even in large-scale generation. I have always thought it daft to import something that we could produce ourselves, even if we have to do so at a higher price. I do not know much about coal mines, but I know enough to know that, once shut, they stay shut. It should concern all hon. Members that sometimes economic features must be regarded on a slightly longer time scale if we are to understand the true worth of our indigenous fuels.

Gas is now literally in the pipeline. Reference has been made to the work done by the late Harold McCusker in this sector. If the gas pipeline had opened in the 1970s, we would still have had a gas alternative to electricity in Northern Ireland, but that has now gone, and it is sadly missed. If it pays us to produce electricity now, it must have been worth while to do so in the 1970s, when it would have involved much lower cost not only to maintain the gas supply, but to expand the gas industry.

It is interesting to learn today that Irish Gas is to pipe gas from Scotland on a spur to Northern Ireland. Was that decision taken on the basis of competitive tendering, was it a quango decision or was it a straightforward Government decision? Where did the competitive edge lie? Will Irish Gas comply with the requirements of the Fair Employment Agency in Northern Ireland, as the issue has a bearing on Northern Ireland? Will those standards apply to the building of the gas pipeline?

Peat has never been used on a large scale in Northern Ireland, but it has been used in the Irish Republic. Using peat brings all sorts of problems, and there may not be enough of it to do anything on a large scale in Northern Ireland. The use of peat was considered in the 1940s and 1950s, but it was decided that it was not viable. Have any recent investigations been done into the possible use of peat for generation or its more widespread use as a fuel in the Province?

There is on-going experimentation with biomass, principally willows, that may have a future as a renewable energy source. Some renewable energy can be used for producing electricity. We use quite a lot of wind power in Northern Ireland. Will any serious effort be made to increase the amount of wind power in Northern Ireland? I know that the door is open, but I am not sure that anybody is going to give it a further shove, and I should like that form of power to be promoted.

There is also some wave power in Northern Ireland. That could be studied to see what use could be made of it in the long term. We also have limited water power. Reference has been made to the Bann scheme, which is quite large, would have been useful and could probably have been developed. However, the Bann has only a small fall—Lough Neagh is only 50 ft above sea level. I have to declare an interest, as I owned and ran water turbines for many years. I grew up with water power, which, once installed, is the cheapest form of fuel.

There are several possibilities for sail power, even on a small scale, but that system is not as simple or easy as some would have us believe, as it necessitates a 440 volt supply. If someone asks Northern Ireland Electricity or its successors for a 440 volt supply on which to hitch up a water turbine, the price for installing the necessary lines will come as a shock. Some people would allege that the price charge was far beyond that which would be quoted if the cost involved using electricity rather than selling it.

There was once a scheme to use the River Roe in Limavady to produce almost 5,000 hp, which is not to be sneezed at. However, it was turned down due to the difficulties of building the dam.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has left the Chamber, as the Camlough scheme, once proposed, has now vanished into the mists of time due to objections from people who are now probably his constituents. If that Camlough scheme had gone ahead, perhaps we would have less trouble today with the poor quality of supply in that district.

Efforts were made, although some were not developed. Some of the projects proved destructive, but I do not believe that we should say that Northern Ireland Electricity did not try. I think it did, but it was restricted by the limited framework within which it had to exist.

There will inevitably be competition, but who will compete? I have never been able to understand how we can have competition unless a sizeable number of organisations are involved in providing the power. That will not be so in Northern Ireland where, due to the limited capacity of the interconnector, we shall never be able to transmit electricity across from Scotland or wherever to provide proper competition. We cannot even have internal competition within the island of Ireland, never mind Northern Ireland. The Government have not yet given a satisfactory explanation of their position on that problem.

The life of generating plant is long and getting longer as technology advances. The next generation of generating plant contains equipment that will certainly last beyond the lifetime of many of us.

How will the new set-up compete? The first cut will involve staff. Which sector of staff will be cut? The cuts cannot take place at the expense of safety, so I suspect that the number of field staff will be cut. There is a limit to how many cuts can be made, as a certain number of hands are needed to do the job. No matter how much automation there is, some people are still needed to work.

There will be interlinking to Scotland and eventually to the Republic, and I hope that it goes ahead. If it does, the cost of electricity will fall and the spinning reserve will be kept much lower.

I am also worried that people of Northern Ireland and the employees of NIE are not being given a chance to purchase. I have drawn the Minister's attention to this before, but I might as well tell him again. Back on 16 May, I asked another Minister:

"Given that one of the ways in which employee participation and ownership was increased was through the sale of nationalised industries, will the Minister give an assurance to the House that the employees of NIE and the citizens of Northern Ireland will have an opportunity to bid for and own shares in Northern Ireland Electricty when it is sold off?"

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury replied:

"That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, but it is inconceivable that he would propose arrangements which would do anything other than what the hon. Gentleman suggests. It is of great imortance that when nationalised industries are privatised we encourage the employees of firms to participate by direct ownership in those companies and that the local population and customers of the industry or service also become owners. That seems to us to be desirable."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1991; Vol. 191, c. 418.]

In fact, it seems desirable to the entire machinery of government except the Northern Ireland Office.

Once again, Northern Ireland is being treated differently. This process would not be acceptable to any other region of the United Kingdom, and I do not see why the Government think it acceptable to the people of Northern Ireland. I note that a pious hope is expressed that large industrial users will be able to make their own separate agreements with suppliers, or possibly even generate their own supply. There are not many places in Northern Ireland large enough to warrant generating their own, but large users will be able to make their own deals and presumably someone else—probably domestic consumers—will have to pay the price.

The Housing Executive will apparently make an agreement to get cheaper electricity for its tenants. It is difficult to imagine a better recipe for a nightmare. The electricity will not be sold to the large estates as such—it will be sold to individual tenants of the Housing Executive and it is they who will pay for it, not the executive. So tenants will pay for the electricity they use, and someone who has bought his house may find himself paying rather more than the fellow next door. I do not look forward to all the complaints which I and every other elected representative of Northern Ireland will receive about such an arrangement. It is just not good enough—like the rest of the bloomin' mess.

I finish where I began, with the Energy Select Committee's report, particularly the first paragraph of its conclusions:

[Mr. William Ross]

"There are some admirable features in the privatisation proposals, including the system of bidding for the right to provide new capacity, the proposed Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation, and the innovation provisions relating to energy efficiency. There are also other welcome developments in prospect, such as the proposed interconnectors and gas pipeline. However, few of these changes are wholly dependent on privatisation, and they are still less dependent on the particular privatisation scheme proposed."

That encapsulates the fears and anxieties of Northern Ireland Members. We are not satisfied that what is being done is right, or that it is being correctly done.

8.33 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): This is one of the last privatisation measures to be introduced by the Government who have been in power between 1979 and 1992. There have been other massive privatisation measures, including the legislation that privatised electricity in Great Britain. We are left with this order for Northern Ireland, which is designed to push through privatisation all in one go.

One wonders what Northern Ireland has done to deserve that. Perhaps because it was not subjected to poll tax, it is having this measure foisted on it. We have been told that the railways and coal are to be privatised, and paving measures to that end have been pushed through the House. They will not be privatised, however, because the Conservatives will not win the next election; but the people of Northern Ireland will have this measure inflicted on them if the decision by the Northern Ireland Committee is overturned tonight by the payroll vote.

The timing of this measure is terrible because it sends out the clear message that devolved government for Northern Ireland is not on the cards, never mind not just around the corner. The Brooke initiative is on ice but still alive, so there is still hope in Northern Ireland that some democratic space will be allowed it so that devolved government can deal with certain significant issues. What could be more significant to the people of Northern Ireland than deciding themselves matters connected with privatisation? They would like to hold debates in which a full legislative measure was presented to them so that it could be amended, fully discussed and—if they wanted—rejected. Instead, the order has been pushed first through Committee and then through the House.

The order is anathema to all Northern Ireland Members, none of whom supported it in Committee, where it was soundly defeated. By a procedural sleight-of-hand, the decision of that Committee is being overridden. Even though a decision has already been made on it, one of the items put before the Committee has been returned to us tonight. It is as though that Committee never existed. This evening we have been left with a few hours in which we can examine just one item instead of discussing the entire complexity of the order.

The order has 95 articles and 381 paragraphs, not to mention a host of subdivisions. I have heard hon. Members on both sides of the House ask questions about the detail, but because of the lack of time and because of the procedures applying to the order they have little hope of being answered in detail. A Bill that went into Committee could be amended line by line, but here we find ourselves only able to ask Ministers what article 75, or the schedule, or a reference in the Select Committee report, mean. With the best will in the world, the Minister cannot cover all those questions; they need to be dealt with one at a time and that could be done only in a normal Committee—a procedure that Northern Ireland does not enjoy.

The order has 13 schedules with 435 paragraphs, one of which deals with the compulsory acquisition of land. That is an important topic and requires debate, especially as that sub-paragraph has 105 components. Some 66 Acts, orders and statutory instruments are referred to in the measure, ranging from the Conveyancing Act 1881 to the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. When we dealt with the planning order in Committee, it had not been allocated a number because it had not completed all its stages in the House and the intention had been to relate it to the order before us. The process for dealing with such large measures is inadequate, bearing in mind the fact that devolved government in Northern Ireland could be around the corner, and the measure could be fully dealt with in the Province.

We have just completed the Committee stage of the Transport and Works Bill. There was no Division on Second Reading and the Bill's general principles were agreed. Amendments were accepted and about 20 improvements were made to the Bill. That measure, which affects private Bills and planning procedures, has been properly scrutinised. Northern Ireland may have electricity privatisation forced down its throat; proper scrutiny would have improved matters, but such scrutiny cannot be given to the order.

The Northern Ireland Committee is looked upon as a waste of time. The Committees that consider European legislation do not have much say, but even they are better than the Northern Ireland Committee. In a European Standing Committee, a Minister can be questioned for an hour and amendments can be tabled in the following hour and a half, although they may be overturned. The order cannot be overturned. If we could have questioned the Minister for an hour about its detail, that would have been some improvement on the existing procedures, even though it would not be perfect.

If direct rule is to continue, I hope that the Government will consider procedures for dealing with Northern Ireland measures in the House because they should not be dealt with in that way. However, even on existing rules, marginal improvements could be of considerable benefit in a serious discussion on Northern Ireland issues. The attendance for the debate is low, even though it deals with bread-and-butter issues which are of key concern to the life of the people and should be fully discussed. Many hon. Members appear in the Chamber when there is a terrorist incident in Northern Ireland or when there is a debate about security or on constitutional issues. We spend too little time on matters affecting the daily lives of Northern Ireland people.

The order is being pushed through before the general election, perhaps because after that election, in a hung Parliament, the Northern Ireland Members could become more significant and could trade away issues such as privatisation. They are not yet in that position, and in any case Labour will gallop home.

I have the feeling that this is not quite a Northern Ireland Office measure, because the Northern Ireland Office attempts to draw people together and to put peace and tranquility, instead of violence, on the agenda. It has carried out some good work. It is inappropriate for the Northern Ireland Office to push a measure as divisive as

this. It is divisive in social terms, in that it is the last fling of the enterprise culture, and divisive in the constitutional sense which I suggested, given the implacable opposition to the measure in Northern Ireland.

Only the Conservative party in Northern Ireland, which as yet has no seats in the House, represents those people in Northern Ireland who are likely to support the measure. Although people may have different reasons for opposing the order and some might accept privatisation if the order were given a different structure, the measure is rejected by the 16 Northern Ireland Members who have taken their seats and by the 17th Member who does not choose to take his seat, the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams). From Sinn Fein to the Democratic Unionist party, there is opposition to the order, but it is not the only issue over which there is occasionally such unity—the same unity existed over the measure to introduce a student loans scheme.

When there is unity in Northern Ireland matters, we should carefully consider the arguments. In Committee, the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) said:

> "We are always being told that if we get together, people will listen to us, but when we do get together on a matter such as this".—[*Northern Ireland Committee*, 13 June 1991; c. 35-6.]

—the hon. Gentleman developed his argument on that premise. Although Northern Ireland Members do not link arms on the issue, there is unity on the matter and it is incumbent on the Northern Ireland Office to listen carefully and to tell its friends in the Cabinet that such a measure is not on.

Public assets in Northern Ireland should remain in the people's hands, especially in areas that are traditionally referred to as public utilities. The enterprise culture is divisive because it sets one person against another, and that is not required in Northern Ireland. The Province needs democratic institutions, civil liberties for minorities and democratic space in which it can make decisions about the quality of life, which will involve issues such as who owns what.

Nowhere else can avenues for discussing bread-and-butter issues be more important than in Northern Ireland. If, as some hon. Members have suggested, Northern Ireland Electricity is a failed quango, collective democratic control should come to the forefront and we should begin to build on that. If Northern Ireland Members had their own institutions, that lesson would need to be learnt by them. The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) said that, when the Great Britain measure for electricity privatisation was discussed, he trooped through the Division Lobby in favour of it.

Many of the arguments that apply to electricity generation in Great Britain apply also to electricity generation in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland faces additional problems connected with the size of the electricity industry and the lack of a democratic framework. If, however, power were devolved to Northern Ireland, some Labour Members would have the opportunity to make representations to those who make the decisions there. Moreover, trade unionists in Northern Ireland would be able to make their views known, as they have done in Committees here, on electricity privatisation. They have appealed here to the Government to take their views into account, but the Government have made only minor concessions.

My concern generally is about democratic socialism and collective provision and the economic measures that go with it. To introduce into Northern Ireland the worst values of the enterprise culture and privatisation is the wrong route to take. Northern Ireland needs a different framework—a democratic socialist framework so that it can begin to solve the many problems that it faces. This measure will do nothing to solve its problems.

8.52 pm

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): As the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) said, there is a thin attendance tonight, but it is a real pleasure to have been invited to speak in the debate on this order. I spent six very happy months in Northern Ireland while I was doing my national service in the Royal Navy. I was stationed in the constituency of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), to whose speech I listened with great interest. While I was stationed there, I served in the anti-submarine establishment HMS Sea Eagle in Londonderry.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not mind if, due to my naval connections, I mention the tremedous success of the privatisation of Harland and Woolf. Now that it has been privatised, that company seems to be going from strength to strength. I hope that in due course it will obtain more orders for the construction of warships. A great deal of electricity will be required for their construction.

While I was in Northern Ireland I owned a lightweight motor cycle. It did not run mainly on electricity; often it did not run at all. When it did, however, I had ample opportunity to see the very beautiful countryside of Londonderry and County Tyrone, and developed a great affection for that beautiful country.

I receive inquiries from time to time about Northern Ireland from my constituents. My constituency adjoins that of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). He and I share the same borough. He has important Northern Ireland responsibilities for the health service and agriculture, which both consume electricity. It is remarkable, with all those pressures on his time, that, somehow, he manages to give a superb service to the people of Richmond and Barnes. He seems to work an eight-day week.

I have not had the opportunity to study the order carefully. Nevertheless, I want to ask about renewable sources of electricity generation and how they would fit into the framework of the order. Due to its geographic position, bordering the Atlantic ocean, Northern Ireland ought to be able to derive great benefit from the development of both wave energy and tidal energy. The waves of the Atlantic ocean are larger than those of some other seas; the floats for the generation of electricity would have to be strong enough to take a considerable buffeting from the waves and not to break loose. If they did, they would endanger shipping and hinder navigation. However, the waves of the sea provide an immense source of natural energy. If wave energy is not financially viable now, I hope that in future the Government will be able to develop this source of energy and that the wealth so generated will benefit Northern Ireland.

I believe that Lough Foyle would be an ideal site for a tidal barrage. I have seen the tidal barrage across the River Rance in Britanny, constructed by the French Government. It is a remarkable achievement and generates

[Mr. Toby Jessel]

a great deal of electricity from the tidal flow. The relatively narrow neck of Lough Foyle at its northern end means that the construction of a barrage would be much less expensive than would be the case at the mouth of the River Severn, for example. It straddles two countries, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

It is not for me to say whether co-operation between the two Governments is good enough at present to make possible the construction of a tidal barrage. When that time comes, I believe that Lough Foyle would be an ideal place for a tidal barrage. I hope that the Minister will assure me that, as part of Government policy, this will be looked into in terms of the future generation of electricity for Northern Ireland.

As for the sale of electricity shares in Northern Ireland, as foreshadowed by the order, I hope that that will benefit the people of Northern Ireland as a whole. I hope that they will have the opportunity to purchase shares on relatively favourable terms, or that at least they will be given the opportunity to obtain an adequate quota of the shares. I should not like the benefits that have been conferred on the rest of the country to be denied to the people of Northern Ireland.

Next, I should like to ask about the pension fund. Can my hon. Friend assure me that it will be protected? I know that the Government are considering this in relation to the whole United Kingdom, and I should like to be sure that the position of the electricity industry is included.

Thirdly, can my hon. Friend tell me about the effect on prices for the consumer? This really is important, and it interacts with the quantity of fuel demanded, and with how people choose between electricity, gas, oil and coal.

Fourthly, can my hon. Friend define a Government policy on pylons? I have referred to the beautiful countryside in Northern Ireland; I should like to be reassured that the long-term trend is to reduce the number of pylons to protect the heritage, because if we do not preserve it, future generations will curse us—and they will be right to do so.

I should like my hon. Friend to describe the benefits that the measure will bring. I hope that the results will promote the economy of Northern Ireland, and strengthen its position within the United Kingdom in a way that all our people would want.

9 pm

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): It is unusual for Northern Ireland business to be given nearly five and a half hours. I was not a member of the Committee that originally considered the Government's proposals, but over the weekend I read some of its proceedings, and in many respects today's debate is an action replay of what hon. Members from the Province said then.

I note that the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) always begins his speeches by complaining about the Order in Council procedure—as, indeed, do many other hon. Members. I must confess that I have done the same in the past, and will do the same in the future: I shall continue to tilt at the conventional windmill. The resolution of the problem, however, lies in the hands of elected Northern Ireland Members, as has been made clear by the Minister and by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall).

I have been in the Chamber for most of today's debate, but I am told that the Secretary of State has made a statement tonight to the effect that the current talks have slowed down somewhat. I very much hope—I speak for my party and, I am sure, for the House as a whole—that the constitutional Members in Northern Ireland will try to make progress with the talks and to find a political solution to the real and deep-seated problems that the Province and its people have faced for the 20 years of the troubles.

Unless and until that happens, we shall be stuck with the status quo. Whether the Minister is the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) or me—when, that is, we have exchanged places at the Dispatch Box—that Minister will still bring major items of Northern Ireland business into the House under the Order in Council procedure. I hope and pray that the time will come when this will no longer be necessary.

Over the years, a policy of bipartisanship has operated between the two Front Benches on most Northern Ireland issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and the Secretary of State have worked together very closely over the past 18 months in an effort to drive forward the Brooke initiative: they have given it every support. Only last week, I paid tribute to the work and enthusiasm that the Minister has put into promoting tourism, as well as industry, in Northern Ireland. I am bound to say, however, that the order will damage his reputation.

The Minister must know, in his heart of hearts, that the order represents the triumph of hope over experience. Unlike his counterparts in Great Britain, he knows that the benefit of hindsight is open to him if he cares to avail himself of it. We in the rest of the United Kingdom have experienced the disastrous consequences of the privatisation of our electricity industry. It defies belief to suggest that the Minister can assure us that all will be for the better, when virtually every hon. Member has his or her own horror story about the effect of privatisation on his or her constituents.

Mr. Jessel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Stott: Not yet. The hon. Gentleman is just moonlighting in this Chamber. He has not been here all day. However, I shall give way to him when I have finished this point.

The order also represents the triumph of ideology over evidence. I must admit that I am somewhat disappointed that the Minister who is in charge of the Northern Ireland economy should be so personally involved with this legislation. His personal commitment to the improvement of Northern Ireland's economy is well known and beyond doubt. He has done much commendable work, which makes it all the more puzzling that he should persist in such a reckless course of action as that on which he is embarked.

I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel).

Mr. Jessel: I wanted to ask the hon. Gentleman, who has not been in the Chamber all evening, what horror stories in the constituencies he is talking about.

Mr. Stott: The hon. Gentleman migh have waited for the development of my speech. I shall come to that point in a moment. He has referred to my absence from the

Chamber. In fact, I was absent on three occasions—first, to go to the toilet; secondly, to have a little supper; and thirdly, to ring my wife. Otherwise I have been here throughout the debate.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Order of priorities.

Mr. Stott: I suppose the toilet was the first priority.

Mr. Jessel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Stott: No.

Before the intervention of the hon. Member for Twickenham, I was saying that it was somewhat puzzling that the Minister should persist in such a reckless course of action. It is not as though he, of all people, is a devotee of the thoughts, sayings and ideology of the previous Prime Minister. Courtesy of certain eavesdroppers, his views on the right hon. Lady are widely known in Northern Ireland and beyond. Indeed, in that regard I agree with every word that he has said. Why, then, does he persist in pursuing the dogmatic simplicities of the 1980s? It is all the more surprising when so much of his good work has been devoted to promoting Northern Ireland as far as possible and protecting it as far as possible from the wild men and women of the Conservative party.

The Minister said that he believes this to be a very good measure indeed. We believe that it is privatisation for privatisation's sake. The Northern Ireland Members have spoken graphically about the perceived effects of these measures on their constituents. In an intervention during the speech of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), I said that not since the hon. Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) introduced the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 has a Northern Ireland Office Minister managed to unify the disparate forces of the Northern Ireland constitutional parties represented in this Chamber against his proposals. It is a remarkable feat on the part of the Minister. I bet that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would very much like to achieve such a degree of unity and unanimity for something much more positive.

The Under-Secretary assures us that Northern Ireland's future energy supplies will be secured once the industry has been sold off. How can he be so sure? The reality is that private generating companies will be interested only in making a profit. Ensuring that consumers get the electricity they require will be incidental to that aim. The Government have abdicated all responsibility for a long-term energy policy to the dictates of market forces well known for their short-term obsessions.

The Minister also assured us that electricity would be supplied at a reasonable cost. We need only consider what has happened in Great Britain to see the hollowness of that promise. Neither domestic users nor the vast majority of industrial consumers have benefited from privatisation of electricity in Great Britain. Is there something about the air in Northern Ireland which will make a difference?

The Minister assures us that competition in electricity generation will be beneficial. One is tempted to ask, "What competition?" I should have thought that the Minister knows enough about neo-classical economics and the economies of scale to realise that he has a choice between unrestrained competition leading to a new private monopoly or bureaucratically regulated wasteful competition.

The hon. Member for Twickenham asked me about the horrors of privatisation in Great Britain. The Minister has said that the proposals will be beneficial for Northern Ireland. In doing that, he said that the privatisation of Telecom, gas and water had been beneficial to the multifarious consumers of those former public utilities. However, he did not say that the privatisation of electricity had been beneficial to the consumers in the rest of Great Britain. As Nye Bevan once said,

"Why read the crystal when he can read the book?"—[*Official Report*, 29 September 1949; Vol. 468, c. 319.]

I invite hon. Members who represent the Province to do precisely that.

A privatised electricity industry elsewhere in the United Kingdom scooped £1,059 million profit in the six months to September 1991. The profit in the second half of the year, which includes the winter months, is expected to be much higher.

Let us consider the area that the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) and I have the privilege to represent. That area is covered by NORWEB—the North Western electricity board. I must at this point place on record my appreciation of NORWEB's sponsorship of Wigan rugby league club. However, having said that, one has to look a little deeper into its profits and loss account.

NORWEB's profits increased sixfold to £33·4 million. That is equal to £17·66 profit per domestic consumer in the first six months of the year. The higher profits followed higher prices in April. Domestic consumers had to fork out 7·26p per unit, which represented a 9 per cent. increase. That was in addition to standing charges totalling £20·88. That was an increase of 18 per cent.—the highest increase in England. Electricity privatisation is a legalised racket. Consumers are overcharged and the bosses are overpaid.

As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) said, the Secretary of State defined one of the goals of privatisation as follows:

"to encourage participation by employees of Northern Ireland Electricity, as well as the electricity consumers in Northern Ireland, in the ownership of that industry."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 285.]

According to today's proposals, that worthy idea seems to have gone by the board. The management-employee buy-out appears to have been completely restricted to Coolkeeragh power station. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry about my mispronunciation of the name of that power station. I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is an aging plant which will need to be replaced in the near future. In the light of what the Secretary of State has said, ministerial assurances will not command great confidence in Northern Ireland.

The determination with which the Government have pursued the issue cannot mask the fact that they do not have a properly defined energy policy. Rather than assess the needs of Northern Ireland and examine the best way in which those needs can be met, they have adopted this form of privatisation as a panacea, but without reference to the real world. Rather than put forward proposals based on reality, the Government hope that their proposals will alter the stubborn reality.

I have been present throughout the debate which has been conducted across the Chamber by hon. Members from Northern Ireland. Nobody is pretending that the current situation is magnificent or superb. Nobody is saying that that situation should continue. Nobody is saying that it is entirely the fault of the work force or

[Mr. Stott]

management in the Northern Ireland electricity industry. There should have been some on-going thinking. Something should have been done years ago.

However, at this eleventh hour, we do not require this spurious form of privatisation—a privatisation which does not bear any relation to the needs of Northern Ireland. It does not give the people of Northern Ireland a piece of the action. If the Minister wants to conform with the previous Prime Minister's belief that the enterprise culture should extend to every nook and cranny of this land, he must agree that the order completely ignores that philosophy. I am totally opposed to the measure, root and branch. If the Minister believes in the enterprise culture, he is not delivering it.

The order would make the need for an energy policy which can secure future energy supplies at reasonable cost more urgent rather than less urgent. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South indicated what our party would do in respect of the imminent general election—it depends when it is called, it depends on the time scale, and it depends on progress in the implementation of the conditions of the order. I reaffirm that if a general election occurs before the order is fully commenced we shall put a hold on it and reverse it. That is a promise which we make to the people of Northern Ireland.

9.17 pm

Mr. Needham: With the leave of the House, I begin by saying to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) what I said to the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). I fully and completely appreciated the vital meeting that he and other Northern Ireland colleagues had this afternoon. When I remarked on the thinness of attendance in the Chamber, I was not referring in any way to those discussions.

It was, as I said to the hon. Member for Antrim, North, a disappointment that so few hon. Members have been able to attend the debate, as I was looking forward to discussing their views in great detail. I appreciate that, unfortunately, fog has detained them, as the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) said. Nevertheless, it is a pity that the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), for example, did not have the opportunity to tell the House his views about the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity and what he now thinks about the privatisation of Shorts and Harland and Wolff in his constituency.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): Should the Minister be in the least doubt about my views—he will certainly know when we vote at the end of the debate—may I say that we discussed this matter in Committee, and I made my views very clear to the Minister. I shall be acting in accordance with those views.

Mr. Needham: I understand that, but I feel that the hon. Gentleman's constituents and the people of Northern Ireland should have the chance to hear those views tested on the Floor of the House so that they can judge how well they match up to the successful privatisations that have taken place in the hon. Gentleman's constituency which I am sure that he now welcomes. I refer, for example, to the massive expansion at Shorts now that it is under alternative ownership, but perhaps the hon. Gentleman still opposes that privatisation.

One thing that has become clear in the debate is that there are as many views about what is wrong with the present position in Northern Ireland Electricity and as many ideas about what might be done as there are parties in Northern Ireland. I shall refer first to some of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy, because it is worth repeating what that Committee unanimously decided. It comprises five Opposition Members and five Conservative Members, with my hon. Friend in the Chair. Its unanimous view was that the Government's proposals on competition did not go far enough. I repeat that the Committee did not think that we went too far: it thought that we did not go far enough. It felt that we should not attempt to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity as an integrated vertical unit.

There were powerful and cogent reasons for that decision, not least the fact that to do so would simply make a public monopoly into a private monopoly—which, I am sure, is not something that any Opposition Member would want. I am sure that hon. Members representing the Social Democrats and the Labour party would not go for that option. I am not clear about the view of the Democratic Unionist party on this matter because we were unable to elicit any view on the way forward from the hon. Member for Antrim, North. However, although that is the view of the Ulster Unionist party, the arguments against were cogently made by the Select Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford adequately answered the point about Scotland, but the most obvious point to make in that regard is that there are two integrated units there in circumstances that are very different from those in which the one unit that the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) proposes would operate in Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford was concerned that we might lose the benefits of scale in the new organisational structure. He asked how we could get around that. A small team in the transmission, distribution and supply company will buy electricity from the power stations on a day-to-day basis and order and call off power in merit order. It will do so according to the fuel price index. It will be assisted in that by several additional competitive pressures that do not exist at the moment.

The first is the R factor, which will be introduced into the TDS company. That means that prices will not be allowed simply to pass through from the generator to the distribution and supply company and then straight through to the consumer. There is no such arrangement at the moment. Secondly, the power stations will want to sell power. At the moment, there is no incentive for the power stations in Northern Ireland either to sell power or even to make it available.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East made the extraordinary comment that the existing merit system provides some form of competition. It does not. The whole point of the privatisation proposal is that it introduces a series of competitive elements into the system through regulation and by putting one generator in competition with another. Splitting the TDS company introduces areas of competition that do not exist at the moment. Furthermore, because we have said that the regulator will be empowered under the licences to determine what the

TDS should charge, we can ensure that will be done on the basis of RPI minus X. That is another pressure that does not exist at the moment.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East says, "Oh well, let us privatise it as a single integrated unit." Then we would have to find the most draconian forms of regulation to achieve some control over that great private monopolistic beast. He and his hon. Friends and other Northern Ireland Members have accused me as the Minister of being incapable of providing that control.

Mr. Beggs: Is the Minister telling the House that the merit order operated at present by Northern Ireland Electricity is not a merit order at all?

Mr. Needham: I am not saying that. I am saying that there is no competition in the merit order. It is called off purely on the basis of what is available and what is the most economic at the time. But that has nothing to do with introducing competition into the system. There is no additional or special payment for availability. Furthermore, Northern Ireland Electricity buys fuel for the whole system—not, as individual generators will do in future, for the individual power stations.

The other argument that was raised by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East and others is based on the Select Committee's comment that many of the policies that we have proposed could have been achieved without privatisation. For example, the Select Committee said that we could have had a gas supply or interconnection in Northern Ireland without privatisation. I do not believe for one moment that without the privatisation proposals the money that might have been available would have gone into gas or an interconnector. On both issues—I must be frank with the House—Northern Ireland Electricity dragged its feet. The money would have gone on transmission lines or Kilroot 2.

The reasons why the money would have gone on Kilroot 2 are those which I have explained to the House and the Northern Ireland Committee on many occasions. Northern Ireland Electricity was determined to foist Kilroot 2 on the people of Northern Ireland whether they wanted it or not, whether or not it has flue gas desulphurisation or whether or not it was competitive. That is where the money would have gone.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Many of us welcome the gas pipeline and we are glad that it is back on the table for discussion. In fairness, does the Minister agree that it has been a matter of considerable debate during the past decade or so that at one stage the European Commission committed itself to giving regional fund aid for the provision of a gas pipeline for Northern Ireland? That project was supported by the Labour party but opposed by the Conservative party.

Mr. Needham: The right hon. Gentleman is referring to the pipeline with the south.

Mr. Taylor: No.

Mr. Needham: All right. But the fact is that gas would not have been on the agenda. It was not purely a question of providing a pipeline to bring gas for domestic use. In any event, as we all know, the amount would not have been sufficient to make the project economic. It comes down to the question of generation. As I have asked the hon. Member for Antrim, East on so many occasions, how on earth could one bring gas generation into Northern Ireland if one did not offer to sell a power station for a gas supplier? The hon. Member for Antrim, East has always failed to answer that question. In his integrated vertical private monopoly proposals he has never dealt with that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford mentioned price-smoothing. The power purchase agreements will allow the generators to smooth prices. The generators will have both short-term and long-term fuel contracts which should enable them to smooth any sharp variations in price. The transmission, distribution and supply company's licence will allow it not to pass on automatically or immediately any fluctuations in price.

I have considerable sympathy with the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford about long-term contracts. They will be reconsidered by the regulator in 2010. It will be possible to cancel them if they are not performing to the benefit of the consumer.

As to the regulator, we have appointed Mr. Geoff Horton, a senior employee of the Office of Electricity Regulation, whom I met recently. I have suggested that he takes the opportunity to meet as many hon. Members representing Northern Ireland as possible in the near future. I am sure that he will be totally committed to looking after the interests of the consumer and the industry.

The regulator will control how much capacity should be available in the system in Northern Ireland. It will not be left to Northern Ireland Electricity to determine and Ministers to agree, as it is now. If arguments break out between the regulator and the generating companies or NIE(TDS), he will be able to refer the matter to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The subject of price exercised the minds of most hon. Members who spoke. Contracts for the purchase of power from the generators have already been set out. They will keep prices constant. Obviously, major changes in the price of fuel will have to be allowed for but the purcashing agreements will keep prices constant during the lives of existing contracts. No new capacity will come on stream until 1996. Therefore, I am able to guarantee that, as I told the House, prices will stay constant at their present levels until 1996, the first time that new generation could enter the system.

Whether prices then go up or down depends on the source of the new electricity. Probably the interconnector will be in place and it will depend what happens to prices in the English and Welsh pool, and on how generous the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) is in assisting us with the cost of that interconnection.

The cost of generation—the cost of fuel—represents two thirds of total electricity prices. The rest comes from transmission, distribution and supply costs. Northern Ireland Electricity will be controlled by the regulator to the extent that it can raise prices, but it will be limited to inflation by the RPI minus X formula, which will take into account efficiencies which the company should be able to achieve.

In addition, we are looking to control the extent to which the transmission and distribution company can pass on its costs. We have not yet fully agreed the details, but tight and transparent controls will be available to hon. Members, to the House and to the public in Northern Ireland, so that they can see for themselves.

[Mr. Needham]

As I said in my opening remarks, there will be a total revenue cap. I do not think that that happens anywhere else in the United Kingdom or in Europe. If NIE(TDS) sells more electricity than forecast—that forecast has to be agreed with the regulator—the following year it will have to reduce prices to take account of the additional amount it sold, thereby ensuring that it will not be able to make excessive or additional profits by selling more power. The cap—a punishment for the company—will ensure that consumers will benefit.

Mr. Stott: The Minister said that there would be a cap if NIE(TDS) sold more power than it originally anticipated. Does that take climatic conditions into consideration? We all know that a sudden cold snap or a storm may bring the lines down and cause a power failure. The generation of electricity is not linear; it varies and has peaks and troughs. There can be the best forecast in the world, but if, as happens in Northern Ireland, there is cold weather for a protracted period and more consumers use electrical power, will the company be penalised for producing more power? Is that what the Minister is saying?

Mr. Needham: It is up to the companies to negotiate and discuss that with the regulator in the light of the available evidence. What would the hon. Gentleman do? He does not like any of this. He wants everything to continue as it is. He wants everything to be done in a cosy Committee Room between civil servants and board members or officials of NIE. I have heard nothing from him about how he expects the consumer to find out transparently and openly about the negotiations.

I have been accused of not having a strategy or policy. I outlined our policy twice during the day, so I trust that the message has got partially through. I hear nothing from the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues about how they will ensure that a green cap is applied to NIE for the benefit of the environment and consumers.

Mr. McGrady: The usual practice in any industry is to increase sales, decrease unit costs and so make a profit. Is the Minister saying that the new companies will not be allowed to increase their sales, thereby achieving greater efficiency per unit cost and so enabling them to reduce the cost to the consumer?

Mr. Needham: The TDS company will not be allowed to increase its profits by trying to maximise the energy that it sells in Northern Ireland. It must abide by the forecast that it will have agreed with the regulator. The hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) is right to say that occasionally climatic conditions will throw the figures out of kilter, but that is a matter for open discussion and debate in a forum that everybody can see for himself. The whole point is that the TDS company must increase efficiency and productivity to make its profit.

Dr. Michael Clark: Will my hon. Friend confirm that under the proposed scheme, should NIE(TDS) generate much more electricity—either through increased sales or because of a cold snap—it will be able to recoup more of its overheads through its extra sales and that, rather than accumulate those recouped overheads as profits, it must decrease its unit cost, although it will be able to keep a little of its extra revenue as an incentive for its efficiency? In other words, the company must pass on the bulk of its extra revenue to its consumers and both the transmission company and its consumers will benefit.

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend should be replying for me. He has put the point even better than I could have dreamt of doing. He is exactly right. That must be of great importance to the consumer and the environment.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East accused me of intransigence. Without exception, everyone, from the Democratic Unionist party—if I understand correctly the speech of the hon. Member for Antrim, North—the Social and Democratic Unionist party and the Labour party to the Government, is opposed to the idea of a vertically integrated private monopoly. It would require draconian legislation. I cannot for the life of me understand how competition could be introduced into such a system.

It is argued that there will be competition when a new generator comes along. How will that happen if the new generator is expected to compete against a vertically integrated private monopoly? Nobody will be attracted if the rules are set by a private monopoly. It would be extremely difficult for a generator to come into the system under those handicaps. That is why we spent a considerable time listening to the views of the Select Committee, which unanimously proposed that we should introduce more competition for that reason.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East, who has done more than any other over the years to make a case for gas—the people of Northern Ireland should be remarkably grateful to him for that—should listen to me on the issue of intransigence. I do not believe that we would have had any chance of providing gas to Northern Ireland if we had not invited potential investors, such as British Gas, to buy a power station.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East said that he was at the coal face. I accept that. He is 2,000 ft underground and covered in dust; I recommend that he come up, take a deep breath, look around and recognise that our alternatives are in the best interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

The order provides competition. There will be an incentive to buy fuel cheaper, new generators will come in on a level playing field and transparency will be provided through regulations. The important element under regulatory proposals is the least-cost option. That is an important point to consider. The TDS company and the generators will have to show that if they need to introduce more generation, there is no better way of achieving that than by doing either as the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) would like, through greater energy efficiency or environmental controls or, as in the case of Coolkeeragh power station, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), by using a power station that will therefore get a longer life than under the present system.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): On the least-cost option, is my hon. Friend saying that the generation company or the distribution company can persuade those producing electricity to spend money on investment in energy efficiency measures for the public rather than on capital investment in new generating capacity?

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Once again, a colleague has made the point better than me. At the least, the system in Northern Ireland will produce a series of choices for the future that do not exist now.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Antrim, East for what he said about what I do in general in the Province. He gave me a back-handed compliment by saying that I do not seem to have much control over NIE and nor do my civil servants. The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I that it is a foolish politician who tells professionals what to do. It is right to say that the Government appointed the board, but there is absolutely no guarantee that, once that board is appointed, and without the competition pressing the board to make the sort of decisions that we have discussed, it would not be quickly seduced by the philosophy of the organisation to which it was appointed.

Those of us involved in Northern Ireland affairs can think of other organisations which have succumbed to that pressure. I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) is smiling about that.

Mr. Jessel: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Needham: I shall do so in a moment.

Job losses are of concern to all of us, especially given the new schemes that are being developed and that are designed to improve productivity and efficiency in NIE. However, the hon. Member for Antrim, East, who represents Larne and many people who work in the power industry, must appreciate that that industry must be competitive because it is crucial to the economy of the Province. The hon. Member for Belfast, East can see for himself what happens when privatisation is successful and a company doubles its turnover in two years, takes on an extra 700 or 800 staff and returns to profit. That is exactly what we want to see take place in Northern Ireland Electricity.

The hon. Member for Antrim, East asked me for assurances on the non-fossil fuel obligation. Other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham, raised that question. The first step is to commission a study, jointly with NIE and the Department, to see what projects exist, what can be developed and what can be brought to commercial viability. Once we have done that, we shall introduce a renewables order that will give the transmission and distribution company a target. There are major opportunities, in terms of renewables, for us to go down that route, and there are some interesting ideas. As other hon. Gentlemen remarked, we must bear in mind the environmental appearance of wind farms and so on, and seek a balance, as we do with pylons.

The hon. Members for Antrim, East and for Antrim, South mentioned pensions. That is a complex issue and there has been widespread and understandable misunderstandings about some of the Government's intentions. Major concessions have been required by the Northern Ireland electricity service committee of management, including future benefit increases up to 10 per cent. of the retail prices index, adjustments made to the scheme to take equal account of the retirement age of men and women and an increase in the benefit payable to spouses.

The new system will provide five schemes to be created by the private sector companies, with all the existing pensioners going into the TDS scheme. The Government have been asked to underwrite private sector schemes against employers' insolvency. We are negotiating those difficult issues and, apart from the latter issue, they have been agreed with the committee of management and the unions. Other industrial relations issues are also under discussion, and the unions are now starting discussions with potential new station owners on outstanding matters. The legislation provides statutory protection in respect of pension rights, ensuring that no one will be worse off.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North asked for further consultation. There has been an immense amount of consultation on this issue. Indeed, there has been more consultation and debate on that issue—without anyone being able to change anyone else's mind—than on almost any other Northern Ireland issue. The Government's proposals are not being rushed through. They were introduced in 1988, and one of our Committee debates even finished half an hour early; so there has been a reasonable time to discuss various views and everyone knows where hon. Members stand on the issue.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North complained about advertising. I must admit that I was not aware of, or asked my views on, NIE's advertising campaign. It is delegated to the NIE board and staff as an operational and management matter and I am delighted that they are taking their service to the public so seriously.

The hon. Member for Antrim, North said that, although he was in favour of competition, it was so difficult that nothing much could be done. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman used that argument in the debate on Shorts and Harland and Wolff. It is difficult and we understand that such changes are radical and challenging. In those debates, hon. Members—with the exception of Labour party spokesmen—said that it was not worth continuing with the status quo. Surely it is right for the politicians in Northern Ireland not only to criticise the Government's proposals, which they have every right to do, but to give some idea of their realistic alternatives to those plans to the people of Northern Ireland. I do not believe that any of their proposals stand up to scrutiny.

The hon. Member for South Down strongly opposed the views of the Ulster Unionist party on a single private monopoly, as did the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon), who spoke—more bluntly than I would have done—about the role of Northern Ireland Electricity and some of its staff in the past. However, when it came to a solution, the hon. Member for South Down said that I was dogmatic and he blamed the civil servants. He seems content to keep bashing his head against a brick wall that he admits is there, on the basis that, if he continues for long enough, he might start to enjoy it. He says that the people of Northern Ireland should rely on the Minister and board. He must also accept—as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh agrees—that relying on the Minister and the board has not got him very far in the past.

I repeat the point that I have already made about the need for competition. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh talked eloquently about the lights going off in one of his constituent's houses when there was a turkey in the oven. I shall not stray into the citizens charter, but with a regulator and a separate consumer council, we shall be able to end the present incestucus relationships that inevitably exist in Northern Ireland because of the public monopoly. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh would then have a much better chance of gaining satisfaction on behalf of his constituents, as he would not have to wait to debate the issue on the Floor of the House.

[Mr. Needham]

The hon. Member for Antrim, South made a series of exceptionally intricate and detailed points that I shall try to answer as best I can. He asked about electrical inspectors and when they were to be used. Article 33 empowers the Department to

"appoint competent and impartial persons to be electrical inspectors".

Article 33(2) lists as one of the inspectors' duties

"*(a)* to inspect and test . . . electric lines and electrical plant belonging to persons authorised by a licence or exemption"

They also have a requirement to inspect or test equipment if required to do so by consumers. The Department will require inspectors to carry out duties such as considering accident reports and carrying out investigations into serious accidents.

On article 19(2) the hon. Member for Antrim, South asked how

"the maximum power which may be required"

in a request for electricity is to be determined and who would pay. Article 19 is intended to apply to large users, but it applies to everyone. Large users can determine the power and will have to pay for the service. Domestic consumers will have to suggest their likely power needs, which can easily be worked out by considering the types and numbers of appliances that they intend to use. There will be no need to charge domestic users. The licensing conditions mean that providing the information will not prove onerous. However, the hon. Member for Antrim, South rightly asked the question, and we shall consider the matter carefully to see how it works in practice.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South also asked about pensions and whether there would be a power to amend the scheme. He asked whether paragraph 2 of schedule 11 would be used after privatisation. The answer is no. That power will be used to make the regulation and, thereafter, it will be up to the scheme's trustees to amend it.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South also asked about an actuarial valuation. That has been carried out and it is a legal requirement to carry it out. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the name of the actuaries, but they were appointed by the trustees of the scheme. It is up to the independent trustees to decide whether they want to publish.

The hon. Gentleman asked how existing funds will be divided. As I said before, at the request of the trustees the scheme will be split into five separate schemes, one for each of the generating stations and one for TDS. At first, they will be mirror image schemes, identical to each other.

The hon. Gentleman asked what will happen to the surplus. It will transfer to the new funds, and it will be up to the trustees to decide how to allocate them. The hon. Gentleman asked whether people can leave and start up personal pension plans. The answer is yes; if any member feels that he could do better by leaving the scheme, he will be entitled to do so.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South asked about article 88—grants towards expenditure during the transitional period. The purpose of that provision is purely to enable the obligations of NIE to be discharged between the vesting of the assets on 31 March and the final dissolution when the accounts of the companies have been prepared.

The hon. Gentleman asked about schedule 4, and in particular about referrals to land tribunals being expensive and operating against the small landowner. I can tell him that they will not be used often, and then only when there is a dispute involving significant costs. It will be in the interests of NIE(TDS) to obtain co-operation, and commercial pressures in the private sector will provide incentives to settle that do not exist under public ownership.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the DED wil be the final arbiter in deciding who should have the right of entry. The answer is yes.

I apologise to the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) for not being here during his speech. He talked about the Order in Council procedure and said, I believe, that it was a disgrace. We had a full debate on that issue. As the Opposition spokesman said, there are strong arguments for change but it will have to come about with the agreement of Northern Ireland Members.

The hon. Gentleman said that he supported electricity privatisation in England. I only wish that he supported it for Northern Ireland too, because I believe that our scheme improves in some respects on the original scheme for England. I hope that the hon. Gentleman maintains the principle with which he started off.

The hon. Gentleman said that this is a public sector monopoly becoming a private sector monopoly. I do not accept that—although, if the hon. Gentleman goes along with his colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party, he may well turn out to be right.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East said that privatisation was not the way forward, but he repeated that gas should have been introduced to Northern Ireland before now, and likewise an interconnecter. How right he was. The problem is that, under the old system, that did not, would not and could not happen.

The hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) said nothing about the merits or demerits of the case, let alone about what Labour would do to help the consumer. I believe that the consumer will be helped by this scheme, much more so than if we continued with a public monopoly dominated, as this one has been for so long, by management and workers.

The hon. Member for Wigan discussed the Order-in-Council procedure. Every year, for every one Bill for Scotland, there are 20 or 25 pieces of primary legislation for Northern Ireland. It is up to Northern Ireland Members to decide how they want to proceed.

The hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) said that he wanted this business left to a devolved assembly—but what would that produce? A private monopoly is the most likely outcome from a devolved assembly, exactly the result that the hon. Gentleman does not want. He told me that I was hiding because I did not explain how the order would work in practice. I hope that he now sees that what I said in practice will work.

What will happen under Labour's proposals if, as the hon. Gentleman promised, a Labour Government do not sell TDS? How will that Government decide what to do about generation? Am I being too cynical in believing that the Opposition, with votes in Scotland but none in Northern Ireland, will decide what is bought for the Province and how?

There was a great sigh of relief from the hon. Member for Leicester, South when he heard that Northern Ireland generators would be sold, because he will not be faced with the consequences. What about the Treasury receipts that

the hon. Gentleman laughed off? If that money is not received, there will be nothing in the kitty for undertaking many other worthwhile projects in Northern Ireland.

The order gives Northern Ireland consumers the best opportunity that they have had since the founding of the state. It gives Northern Ireland people the chance to own shares for the first time and it is a transparent way to plan for the future. It is an excellent order, and it will be approved for the benefit and with the support of the people of Northern Ireland.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the motion, pursuant to Order [24 January].*

The House divided: Ayes 198, Noes 121.

Division No. 56] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Emery, Sir Peter
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
George, Bruce
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hoyle, Doug
Hume, John
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfedder, James
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCrea, Rev William
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon

McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Murphy, Paul
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robinson, Geoffrey
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Resolved,

That the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

Mr. Speaker *Then put the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the other motion relating to Northern Ireland.*

Resolved,

That the draft Electricity (Northern Ireland Consequential Amendments) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

PUBLIC HEALTH

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning) (No. 13) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2901), dated 20th December 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 20th December, be approved. —*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(9) (Standing Committees on European Community documents),

FITMENT OF SPEED LIMITERS TO HGVs AND PCVs

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 7816/91 and 8046/91, relating to the fitment of speed limiters to certain classes of heavy goods vehicle and passenger carrying vehicles; and agrees with the Government's view that limiters will bring worthwhile casualty savings and environmental benefits subject to there being adequate arrangements to ensure that the terms of the proposal are properly complied with.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

TOURISM (OVERSEAS PROMOTION) (WALES) BILL

[MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Wales) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of moneys provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the provisions of the Act in the sums so payable under the provisions of the Development of Tourism Act 1969.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Attacks on Police (North Yorkshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): In recent weeks, there have been a number of vicious, unprovoked and unwarranted attacks on police officers in North Yorkshire, in which officers have sustained serious injuries. I am glad to have the opportunity to draw the attention of Ministers and other hon. Members to the profound public anxiety that exists about the growing amount of violence against police officers, and to reflect on what we could do about it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department for replying to the debate, and to my colleagues who, through their presence this evening, have demonstrated their concern and that of their constituents.

I am indebted to the chief constable of North Yorkshire, Mr. David Burke, for the following details of the incidents that have prompted considerable disquiet and distress throughout north Yorkshire.

At 7.50 pm on 20 December, a police officer received hospital treatment for a suspected fractured cheekbone, concussion and bruises to the head and body after being attacked by a drunken man. At 2 am the following day —21 December—another police constable suffered two black eyes and a broken nose when endeavouring to arrest two men about to steal a motor car.

At 4.35 am on 22 December, a policewoman was attacked and knocked unconscious by a suspect in a Harrogate car park, where she remained for an hour until she was discovered by colleagues. At 12.6 am on 7 January, a police constable was struck over the head and suffered concussion, cuts and bruises while investigating an attempted burglary. At 12.30 am on 18 January—even after this debate was arranged—a police constable in Scarborough sustained cuts to his hands and face and injury to his right leg during a disturbance at a pizza takeaway.

In this letter about these incidents, the chief constable tells me:

"Sadly, these attacks are no longer unusual in today's society and it is having to become an accepted part of the job.."

The job is a great deal more dangerous than it used to be. While I was a Metropolitan police officer in the 1960s, I was assaulted more than once, but I do not think we faced the kind of vicious attacks that have become all too frequent today.

It may be significant that four or five of these incidents took place after midnight or in the early hours. In three incidents, officers on the beat appear to have confronted criminals in the act of stealing of or from a motor vehicle or about to commit another crime. The most recent incident seems to typify the kind of aggressive, violent conduct that has become all too familiar among young men who are the worse for drink and for whom a Saturday night brawl has become a desirable attraction.

Last year, 149 officers in the North Yorkshire police were assaulted. That is one assault for every eight officers. Thirteen officers sustained serious injuries, against only six in the previous year. The number of working days lost because of assaults rose from 274 in 1990 to 419 last year.

The experience of North Yorkshire police is shared by police forces throughout the United Kingdom. In my region of West Yorkshire, 700 police officers—one in every seven—were assaulted in 1991. In Northumbria, the number was 872—one in every four. In Lancashire, Humberside, Durham and Cleveland, one in six or one in seven officers were assaulted.

It no longer seems to matter whether we are talking about notorious clubland areas of our major cities or about the more traditionally peaceful rural backwaters. The chance of any police officer—rural village bobby or member of an inner-city late-night task force—being attacked and sustaining serious injury is very real. Commenting on BBC Radio York this morning, a young rural beat police constable from my constituency, who has been assaulted three times in his five and a half years in the force, described how the fear of assault was constant and undermined police confidence.

All too often young criminals—especially the young—resort to violence in resisting arrest, while routine, premeditated and organised thuggery seems to typify the anti-authoritarian attitude displayed by rowdy, loutish hooligans, who form a significant minority of today's youth. The level of violence confronting the police is evidenced by the regrettable increase in the number of police officers murdered while on duty.

The recent brutal murder of two Metropolitan officers—Sergeant Alan King in Walthamstow and Detective Constable Jim Morrison in Covent Garden—and the attempted murder of Constables Castrey and Jenkinson, all involving vicious knife attacks, deeply shocked and saddened the entire police service and the public as a whole.

I find it almost impossible to describe my sense of outrage at these mindless acts of savagery and my utter condemnation of those responsible. Thank God there are still many young men and women with the principle, the courage and the fortitude to serve the public in today's police and the tenacity and determination to stand up to the thugs and the criminals. We pay tribute to their bravery, and we express our gratitude to their wives and families, who must face many anxious and worrying moments.

Are we doing enough to help the police in the difficult task that they face or can more be done to protect them? We must consider two separate matters—first, the prosecution of police assault cases and the sentences imposed by the courts; and secondly, protective measures for individual officers.

Last February, during the Report stage of the Criminal Justice Bill, Ministers promised a six-month review of police assault cases to discover whether assaults were being prosecuted with sufficient vigour and whether the courts were using their sentencing powers to the full. It is time that we knew how that review is progressing.

Hundreds of officers have been seriously injured since we last debated the issue. We cannot be complacent; the need for action is urgent. There have been many calls, including some from colleagues in this place, for a mandatory prison sentence for assaulting a police officer. I believe that, for those who assault police officers and cause serious injury, a long prison sentence should be the norm, if not mandatory. It should be longer by far than a court might consider appropriate in similar assault cases, because an attack on a policeman is more serious.

Prison is the normal option for someone who holds a court in contempt. Surely, when a police officer is assaulted, the assailant shows contempt for authority, and prison should be the norm for him too.

Parliament has a duty to ensure that the police have all the equipment and facilities they need to carry out their task and prevent needless injury when attacked. The primary responsibility for that rests with police authorities, but it is up to Parliament to take the lead.

The police helmet was designed to protect an officer from injury by a blow to the head. The truncheon was designed to help disarm an attacker. They are no longer enough in many patrol situations. I understand that some police officers have purchased with their own money bullet and knife-proof protective vests. That shows the extent of concern felt by police officers about the risk of being assaulted or attacked. We must examine urgently whether protective clothing should be available to all patrolling officers if they wish to wear it and if it can be designed to facilitate the ease of wear and general appearance.

The Police Federation has called for side-handled batons to be issued for officers on patrol in place of truncheons. Those batons are now standard issue in more than half the police forces in America, where they have been extremely successful in protecting officers who have been properly trained in baton use. This baton enables an assailant to be restrained and handcuffed speedily. More importantly, it allows an officer to keep an attacker at a distance and out of knife range. However, that seemingly vital tool is being denied to police officers in Britain. Surely, at the very least, it should be introduced by one or two forces for an extensive trial period.

His Honour Judge Pickles recently called for police officers to be issued with a stun weapon to help to disarm suspects or criminals armed with guns. That followed a shooting incident at Rastrick in West Yorkshire. I know of no such weapon, but the idea has considerable merit and it could help avoid more police officers being routinely issued with firearms—something that I and most other hon. Members do not want to see.

Training in self-defence, even in the martial arts, is a crucial aspect of police protection. It is also vital that communication and contact with patrolling officers is maintained at all times. North Yorkshire police will complete a three-year programme this year for upgrading computers, telephones and radio patrol systems—a new completely integrated network—which will bring considerable benefits to the efficiency and operation of the force's patrol rooms.

There is, however, already genuine concern that current arrangements for capital spending allocations will hamper the updating and replacement of that generation of technology within the next five years. I commend to my hon. Friend the Minister an excellent report prepared by the chairman of North Yorkshire police committee, Major Parfect, calling for consultations with Her Majesty's chief inspectorate of constabulary, Sir John Woodcock. It makes a number of valuable recommendations about police resources, forward planning, and the development of strategy for policing priorities.

An overall strategy for the enhancing of the protection of our police officers is what is needed, and needed now. We should establish a new working party with experts drawn from the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Police Federation and local authority associations to examine many issues—for example,

[Mr. John Greenway]

protective clothing, side-handled batons, disarming weapons, training and communications—with the clear objective of making urgent recommendations to police authorities about what they should do to reduce the risk of officers sustaining serious injury from assault. The public expect nothing less.

We must also continue our initiative of increasing the number of policemen available for outside duties. North Yorkshire has been authorised to recruit another 50 officers since the last election. We were disappointed to have been allocated only four more officers this year, but we recognise that the prior claim of other police forces is important. Interestingly, eight officers will be returned to normal duties as a result of this year's improvements in the control room arrangements to which I have referred.

The police have regularly called for better and increased powers to stop and search. Surely only those who break the law have anything to fear from being asked by police to explain their movements and agree to their pockets or vehicles being searched. Stronger powers could help to discourage delinquents, vandals and criminals from carrying knives and firearms, particularly replica guns, which have become a real menace. We need to re-examine the law relating to replicas. It should be an offence to carry a replica firearm in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. That would put replica guns on all fours with knives.

The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 makes it an offence to carry a replica firearm in the commission of a crime. If I understand the position correctly, the onus is on the prosecution to prove that the accused used or intended to use the replica in the commission of the offence. I suggest that we reverse the burden of proof without delay.

Referring to the tragic killing of Police Sergeant Alan King just before Christmas, *Police* magazine said:

"Alan King's sacrifice has left another devastated police family bereft of a husband and a father. It has reminded the people of London (not that the vast majority had forgotten), that there is another side of the coin. It shows a service which, every night and day of the year, serves and protects the people, and whose members put their lives at risk to defend the oldest values of civilised society."

That is true of North Yorkshire police and of every police force throughout the United Kingdom. I deliberately say the "United Kingdom", to include Northern Ireland.

Attacks on police officers are attacks against authority, society and democracy. No civilised society should tolerate the present level of violence against the police as routine and a matter of course. Rising crime and mindless violence should not be considered inevitable. They can be checked and reversed, provided that we have the political will, the strength of purpose and the determination to take the strong measures needed to achieve that goal. I am in no doubt whatsoever that the public demands and will support the strongest possible response to attacks on our police—indeed, they expect nothing less from a Conservative Government.

10.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) has raised a matter which rightly gives concern to the public not only in North Yorkshire but in the United Kingdom generally. There is a sense of outrage, which is not surprising, given some of the appalling attacks which have recently been reported and to which my hon. Friend so graphically drew attention—as he is especially qualified to do, as a former member of the Metropolitan police.

We know that there were just over 17,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales in 1990, and slightly more in the previous year. In about 10 per cent. of cases, the police officer concerned was so seriously injured that hospital treatment was necessary and in two horrific cases, alas, the police officers died.

Let us be absolutely clear that attacks on police officers in the course of their duty, whatever the extent of the injury received, are nasty and despicable and deserve to be punished accordingly. The police are especially vulnerable and have a difficult job to do on our behalf. The Court of Appeal has repeatedly made it clear that a deliberate attack on a police officer which inflicts harm should be dealt with severely. Immediate custody is justified even if the injury is relatively minor. For the most serious attacks on police officers, as on any person, Parliament has provided very severe maximum penalties. A life sentence is mandatory for murder. Present policy is that a person convicted of murdering a police officer will stay in custody for at least 20 years.

The number of assaults on police officers over the Christmas/new year period revealed in the survey conducted by the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the details of which were widely reported in the media last week, did not make pretty reading. This is the first time that ACPO has conducted such a "snapshot survey", so there are no equivalent figures for previous years. Neither ACPO nor Her Majesty's inspectorate is aware of any international figures with which they might be compared. Nine out of the 744 assaults on the police in the survey period took place in North Yorkshire. The chief constable has provided sobering examples of those assaults—my hon. Friend quoted some. They unfortunately led to some of his officers requiring medical treatment for the injuries that they received.

Even one assault on the police is too many, but the picture as a whole for 1990—the last year for which fully comparable national figures are available—is that the percentage of sick leave in North Yorkshire due to assaults was less than a third of the average figure for England and Wales. That shows that, despite its problems, the county force is not suffering disproportionately from the effects of violent behaviour in its area, either in relation to the country as a whole or in relation to neighbouring forces. However, I realise that that is cold comfort when one bears in mind the figures for the country as a whole.

As my hon. Friend rightly said, Parliament has given the courts a range of penalties to use according to the circumstances of the case but, like my hon. Friend, the Government are anxious to obtain comprehensive information about the way in which the courts deal with cases involving different degrees of assault in different parts of the country. We have therefore conducted a six-month survey of sentencing practice in the courts during the period to the end of December 1991. The survey will be published as soon as all the returns have been received and the results analysed, when we shall also examine what further action is necessary.

My hon. Friend referred specifically to the side-handled baton. If a force wished to conduct a trial with side-handled batons, it would be free to do so. The

decision is one entirely for the chief officer. However, it is unlikely that a force would introduce the baton unilaterally. Such a weapon raises a number of policing issues, and the matter would no doubt be referred to ACPO for a policy decision because of its concern that equipment should be standardised wherever possible.

My hon. Friend asked whether there should be a joint ACPO/Home Office working party to look into improvements of existing equipment and into new equipment which might provide increased protection for officers. In fact, both ACPO and the Home Office already have in place the mechanisms to evaluate developments in public order equipment.

The public order forward planning unit, a national unit based in New Scotland yard has the duty of considering the equipment that is required by the police service to deal with all types of violence and public disorder. It reports to the Home Office and to the appropriate ACPO committees. In addition, the Home Office police scientific development branch undertakes research on behalf of the police service. It has only recently completed research on stab-resistant materials, and its report is available to chief officers. It is also currently working, inter alia, on a minimum standard specification for police riot helmets, and on a project on flame-retardant overalls. But if ACPO wished to conduct a trial, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary would give it full Government assistance.

Indeed, in a recent answer to a parliamentary question from my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) about the introduction of side-handled batons for the police, I made it clear that we would be prepared to arrange for a scientific evaluation of any—I repeat, any—equipment that might help in public order control, if chief officers requested it.

Those who use knives to inflict serious injuries, whether the victim is a private citizen or a member of the police service, can expect to spend a long time in prison. My hon. Friend mentioned replica firearms. At the request of the Home Office, the firearms consultative committee has considered the issue. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is looking urgently at recommendations made by the committee. They involve, first, extending the range of offences relating to the misuse of replica firearms and, secondly, ensuring that in future the packaging of such weapons carries a warning about offences and penalties relating to their use.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale mentioned stun weapons and the suggestion of Judge Pickles that such weapons should be made available to the police. My hon. Friend felt that that suggestion should be considered. Again, if chief officers believed that any products available would help to protect police officers from attacks, the Home Office would be prepared to make a full evaluation. However, there are considerable practical difficulties, at least in the police using stun guns to repel attacks. They can only be used at close range, because for the stun to take effect it is necessary to make contact with the attacker. Moreover, the operational effectiveness of the weapon can be greatly reduced by such simple factors as the amount of clothing worn by the assailant.

There would also be difficulties in deciding on the appropriate charge to use. The degree of force required to stun someone would vary according to the age, stature and health of the person. A miscalculation might easily result in either little effect or a lethal effect. A stun gun is not, I regret to say, a safe, simple and reliable alternative to the officer with a firearm in circumstances when firearms might be needed.

My hon. Friend also mentioned manpower. Of course, police manpower has been increased in the years that the Government have been in office, not least in North Yorkshire. My hon. Friend described how the number of operational officers could be increased by sensible arrangements, especially civilianisation. He also said that chief officers appreciated the latitude and discretion that they have to make their own judgments about how to spend money on equipment. We are considering the recommendations made by the Audit Commission to see how that discretion can be increased still further.

Home Office representatives are taking soundings from various police forces, including North Yorkshire, to come up with further recommendations. If it appears that it will be useful for police forces and mean that money is better and more responsibly spent, greater discretion and choice will lie with the police authority and chief police officers.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the deeply disturbing and pressing matter of attacks on police officers and for giving me the chance to respond to the particular points that he raised.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 28 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

AVON WEIR BILL *[Lords]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

CROSSRAIL BILL

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL

Ordered for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday next.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education and Training

1. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds in full-time education or training in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* the most recent year for which figures are available.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): There has been a dramatic improvement in staying-on rates since 1979. In 1989-90, 75 per cent. of 16-year-olds participated in full-time education or youth training schemes, compared to 46 per cent. in 1979-80. Corresponding figures for 17-year-olds were 58 and 29 per cent. respectively. If part-time provision is included, the figures rise to 86 per cent. of 16-year-olds in 1989-90.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my hon. Friend agree that assessing ability only in terms of academic achievement sells young people short? Is not one reason for the remarkable increase in the number of young people in training—from 6,000 in 1979 to 260,000 today—the fact that we have returned to the common-sense recognition that vocational training is of considerable value and more closely reflects the abilities of many young people? Will my hon. Friend explain how national vocational qualifications help vocational training?

Mr. Eggar: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. It is terribly important that this country takes vocational training seriously. We need to motivate young people, whatever their aptitude or ability, to acquire further qualifications if we are to have a competitive and well-motivated work force in the 1990s and the next century. National vocational qualifications are a critical element in motivating youngsters and ensuring that their achievements are recognised rapidly.

Mr. Skinner: Has the Minister considered whether it would make more sense if young men and women from working-class families who leave school at 16 or 17 and are thrown into slave labour schemes where they earn a little over £20 a week, but who want to stay on at school, could stay on and be paid a sum equivalent to what they would get on training schemes? As a result, they would be better educated and would not be thrown on the scrap heap.

Mr. Eggar: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would apologise to the House for the last Labour Government's appalling record. In 1979, only 46 per cent. of youngsters stayed on in full-time educational training. That figure has now risen to some 86 per cent., which shows the Government's achievement. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my hon. Friend agree that the welcome improvement in staying-on rates may be related to the quality of education in schools? Is not it significant that the 10 authorities with the worst staying-on rates are all Labour controlled and that many of them also figure among the 20 authorities whose students have the worst GCSE results?

Mr. Eggar: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. It is extraordinary that the Labour party consistently complains about resources and other matters yet is not prepared to point the finger where is should be pointed —at the performance of Labour-controlled local education authorities, as evidenced in staying-on rates and examination results. The Labour party should worry more about the quality of education offered by the education authorities that it controls, rather than going through its political rhetoric.

School Buildings

2. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to enable local education authorities to improve the fabric of school buildings.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): We have provided £1·8 billion worth of annual capital guidelines and capital allocations to local education authorities and governors of voluntary-aided schools since 1990-91. It is for them to ensure that those substantial resources are used effectively.

Mr. Evans: Is the Minister aware that that sum will in no way meet the amount needed for the enormous backlog of repairs to schools in England, Wales and Scotland? Is he aware that in St. Helens, of the two bids submitted, £1 million was requested to meet health and safety requirements and £1 million was requested for essential repairs? The authority was allocated £587,000. Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge, therefore, that a number of schools have not yet been made safe for pupils? Is not that disgraceful?

Mr. Fallon: I increased the allocation to St. Helens for improvement work from £311,000 last year to £556,000 this year. St. Helens' overall allocation was low because it did not bid for new places and put any proposals to tackle

its serious surplus place problem. Some 6,900 surplus places exist there. That includes more than one quarter of secondary school desks, which are empty.

Mr. Madel: Will my hon. Friend confirm that, when the Education (Schools) Bill becomes law, local education authorities will still have an absolute right to inspect the schools that they maintain, whenever they want to, so that they are always aware of the maintenance that needs to be done?

Mr. Fallon: Not to inspect schools, no, but LEAs will retain reserve powers to ensure that the budget delegated is managed appropriately. Under the Education Reform Act 1988, if an authority believes that a budget is mismanaged it has the ultimate power to withdraw it.

Mr. Loyden: The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there is some relationship between surplus school buildings and the fabric of schools is nonsense. There are many surplus buildings in Liverpool, but that does not affect the way in which the local authority can carry out necessary improvements, particularly to inner-city schools.

Mr. Fallon: I was simply making the point that there is a cost in keeping a school desk empty—in St. Helens it amounts to about £1·5 million every year. It is perfectly open to LEAs to obtain higher capital allocations from my Department by putting forward sensible proposals to rationalise their school provision.

Standardised Testing

3. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the implementation of standardised testing in schools.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Testing is the key to raising standards in our schools by providing clear information about pupils' progress. Effective annual tests of seven-year-olds are already in place. Tests of 11, 14 and 16-year-olds will follow in the next three years.

Mr. Amos: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that last year's testing of seven-year olds showed that our schools need less play and more learning, less discovery and more teaching, less mixed ability and more setting, less child-centred education and more whole-class subject teaching? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the best way to raise standards in our schools is to provide more testing and to make the results of those tests publicly available—both of which the Labour party opposes?

Mr. Clarke: Yes, I certainly accept that. The results show an unacceptably wide difference between the performance of the very best and that of the very worst. They show that those tests have nothing to do with the amount spent per pupil in individual authority areas—some of the biggest spenders were right down at the bottom. They also show that results do not necessarily have anything to do with socio-economic circumstances or anything of that kind. I share my hon. Friend's belief that the answer lies in the sort of suggestions that he made and which have been revealed in the report of the three wise men.

Mr. Flannery: Does the Secretary of State understand that the testing of seven-year-olds does not quite mean that? He needs to be more careful. An academic year has three terms and children enter school at various stages in that year. Many of the children who are tested are only six. The results over two to three years will include those for children who missed out two terms and who were tested before the age of seven—they will account for a large percentage of the results. The Secretary of State has got it completely wrong. Daily assessment has gone on for all these years, with tests occasionally being undertaken—that is a reality. If testing is to be done, it should be done properly. The test for seven-year olds should not include children who have not yet reached that age.

Mr. Clarke: First, the good news. I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh?"] I meant the hon. Gentleman, but he almost became my hon. Friend because of his grudging acceptance of the principle of testing. It is certainly true, as he says, that tests for seven-year-olds are a shorthand way of describing the progress of those at a particular stage. Some of them have spent more terms in schools than others—which must be borne in mind when looking at the position of an individual pupil—but all those factors even out in the local authorities. For example, the performance of the hon. Gentleman's authority, Sheffield, was markedly inferior to that of Rotherham, although the discrepancies of the sort that he described do not exist in those two authorities.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Do not we owe it to all our children, right across the country and irrespective of their primary schools, to identify their needs, strengths and weaknesses at an early age? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Labour party is a party of slow learners? Not only has the Labour party not realised that GCSE results at 16 in Labour-controlled authorities are some of the worst, but it has learnt nothing—it still opposes standardised testing from the age of seven.

Mr. Clarke: I agree that it is essential to get the basics of primary education right, because until a child has mastered them it has no possibility of gaining access to the rest of education. I agree also that it is absurd to suggest that there is anything wrong with national testing of pupils' progress at certain ages, both to inform parents and to inform localities about the performance of their schools. It is extraordinary that that has been resisted even before we have received the first results.

Mr. Straw: Is the Secretary of State aware that one of the most damning conclusions of the report on primary education which he published last week was the evidence that standards of reading among seven-year-olds have slumped since 1988, over precisely the period when Ministers have produced one change after another in the system of standardised testing for seven-year-olds? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman ashamed of that record—of the fact that the reading standards of seven-year-olds have slumped by up to five months? Is he ashamed of the fact that every month he has been in office reading standards of seven-year-olds have fallen? Why is it that the Government promised higher standards of education in 1979, 1983 and 1987 but the results of 13 years in office have been lower standards of education?

Mr. Clarke: I seem to recall that the hon. Gentleman was one of those who until recently persistently argued

that standards in our schools were not falling and that he resisted pressure for changes in teaching methods and other ideas designed to correct the fall. He merely strengthens the conclusions of the three wise men, who think that there may have been some recent decline but who certainly did not atribute it to the national curriculum, as the hon. Gentleman did. They reject that argument.

The hon. Gentleman has no evidence for asserting that standards have dropped month by month. If he is beginning to share the public anxiety about standards in our schools, he should be ashamed of himself for having resisted each and every reform that has been aimed at reversing the trend and improving them.

University Education

4. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of the population attended university education in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* Scotland in 1990-91.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): Separate age-participation indices for universities only are not calculated, nor are separate indices for England and Wales; but taking higher education as a whole, provisional data for the 1990-91 academic year show that 19·3 per cent. of young people entered higher education in Great Britain compared with 26·5 per cent. in Scotland.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman might do well to remember that Great Britain includes Scotland. I think that he meant England and Wales for one part and Scotland for the other.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given the higher participation rate in Scotland and the importance of the four-year degree there, it would be right to allocate proportionately more resources to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council? If he does agree, how much more does he propose to allocate?

Mr. Howarth: The division of Universities Funding Council funding will be decided in due course in consultation with all the Departments concerned, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, always a powerful advocate for Scottish interests, has said that Scotland will receive a fair share of those resources.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does my hon. Friend agree that our achievements in that aspect of education could not be better illustrated than by that which pertains in Nottinghamshire, where the university now has the highest ratio of applications to available places and where Nottingham polytechnic, which is soon to be a university, is planning to increase its capacity over the next couple of years to 16,000 student places? Is not that real success in higher education?

Mr. Howarth: As a Nottingham Member, my hon. Friend is justly proud of the higher education opportunities for his constituents in their own home city where we have a fine polytechnic and a magnificent university. I readily join him in paying tribute to the remarkable achievements of the academic and other staff in those institutions of higher education in terms of the wonderful opportunities that they are offering to more and more of our young people and to people of all ages.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Scottish universities now take many students from the Republic of Ireland and Scotland has to pay the full tuition fees for all those students. Given that the Republic of Ireland does not pay the tuition fees of the few Scottish students in the Republic, is that additional burden on Scottish universities taken into account and are larger grants made available to those universities on that basis?

Mr. Howarth: The right hon. Gentleman is alluding to the arrangements for the support of students in higher education that apply within the European Community. All relevant factors are taken into account by the funding councils when they decide how to allocate resources.

Grant-maintained Schools

5. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have applied for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: I am delighted to say that, to date, 315 schools have opted for grant-maintained status.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is not it a fact that the Labour party would throw out of the window all the grant-maintained schools and return them to the control of its friends in the town halls? Is not it also a fact that pupils in the worst authorities, run by Labour, have the worst GCSE English and maths results? That is what would happen to education if that lot ever gained control.

Mr. Eggar: The Labour party is dedicated to lowering standards. One of its latest pledges is to destroy our A-level system. My hon. Friend is right that the Labour party would be prepared to overrule parental ballots and to take grant-maintained schools back into the throes of LEA control, which is exactly what parents have voted to escape.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Minister has just appointed two of his own governors to Stratford school in my constituency. Given the national publicity surrounding that school and the instability and chaos there, what procedure exists for schools that lose or have removed from them their grant-maintained status?

Mr. Eggar: It would be wise if the hon. Gentleman actually looked at the record of Stratford school. When Newham had finished trying to destroy that school, it had about 300 pupils, but there are now almost double that number. When Newham's custody of that school ceased, the standards of education were appallingly low, but Her Majesty's inspectors now report a significant improvement in educational standards there——

Mr. Tony Banks: Answer the question.

Mr. Eggar: Those are the real facts about Stratford, not the black propaganda that the hon. Gentleman wishes to put around.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my hon. Friend agree that the principal attraction of grant-maintained schools is not the additional funding that they receive but the greater independence from the LEAs that they then enjoy? Does he further agree that, following the re-election of the

Conservative party to office after the next general election, there will be an avalanche of applications from state schools seeking grant-maintained status?

Mr. Eggar: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I know that he has first-hand experience of the benefits of GM schools, as the school that used to be known as Wold Newton transferred to grant-maintained status a few months ago and is showing the way and what can be achieved as a result of a move to grant-maintained status.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the Minster confirm that if the bribes that the Secretary of State reinforced in terms of capital allocations for grant-maintained schools last week were extended to meet the right hon. and learned Gentleman's other pledge to extend that to every possible school, the cost would be the equivalent of more than one penny on VAT?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Lady is somewhat confused. I have not heard even the chief Opposition Treasury spokeman talk in terms of putting one penny on VAT. Perhaps the hon. Lady should go for a tutorial with him to understand how VAT is collected. As to her other point, I can say only what I said to her about her calculations on nursery school resources. She is not even at level 1 in maths, and should get some help.

Torrells School, Grays

6. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to make a decision on the application for grant-maintained status from Torrells comprehensive school, Grays, Essex.

Mr. Eggar: Not later than the end of February.

Mr. Janman: My hon. Friend will be glad to know that my constituents, particularly those who are parents at this school, will be pleased to hear that he will make a fast decision. He will be aware that the parents at the school voted by a ratio of nearly 3:1 for grant-maintained status. I am sure that he will wish to join me in congratulating the governors, the headmaster and the parents involved in the school on their wisdom in applying for grant-maintained status so as to free themselves from the bureaucracy and interference of the local education authority. Will he ensure that the decision that he makes is a positive one?

Mr. Eggar: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. I stand by what I said—I shall do my utmost to get a decision by the end of February. I welcome the commitment that has been shown by the head of the governing body, but I cannot give any hint of the decision that I will be taking by the end of February.

Mr. Leighton: Will the Minister have a care with Torrells school in view of the mistake that he made with Stratford school? Is he aware that Father Reilley, the chairman of the governors, has already been disposed of, that the new chairman had a brawl with the head teacher, to which the police had to be called, that the chairman has purported to sack the head teacher and that the Department has intervened and had correspondence and has appointed new governors? Do we have——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The question is about Torrells school.

Mr. Leighton: Do we have local management of this school or is it run by the Department?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman probably needs a geography lesson. Stratford school is not in Essex, as he should know. With regard to what he said about Stratford school, if he had taken rather more interest in the school when it was in the control of Newham and insisted on the school keeping up to reasonable standards and if he now put pressure on Newham LEA to ensure that it raised standards in schools, he would be doing more for his constituents than he is by his performance today.

City Technololgy Colleges

7. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current number of established city technology colleges.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Thirteen city technology colleges are already established, and two more will be open by autumn next year. The extension of CTC principles and practice into the rest of state education is also under way. I announced on 15 January the establishment, with the joint support of British Aerospace, of Hutton grammar school in Lancashire as the first voluntary-aided technology school. We are receiving many worthwhile bids from schools wishing to become technology schools in response to the announcement we made of the availability of capital funds for this purpose.

Mr. Cryer: Is not it the truth that CTCs have emerged only as a result of the lavish use of taxpayers' money to prop them up? Will the Secretary of State accept that in Bradford, the capital expenditure on one CTC is roughly the equivalent of the whole of the capital expenditure for one year awarded by the Government, but Bradford public schools are in dire need of expenditure? Is not it true that the Government's attitude towards CTCs is private affluence and, towards the rest of the education system, public squalor?

Mr. Clarke: The Mickey Mouse figures on CTC expenditure that critics in Bradford tend to use compare capital expenditure on schools starting from scratch with that for existing schools that do not have to be built. The funding of CTCs is on a par with that of other local education authority schools, and their recurrent funding will not be different from that of other schools in their areas. CTCs offer education opportunities to children of all abilities—particularly those drawn from the most deprived parts of the cities that they serve. It is unbelievably churlish if, for ideological reasons, the hon. Gentleman remains hostile to the best innovation in Bradford for years, while defending a local authority that had the worst results in the country in the recent tests for seven-year-olds.

Mr. William Powell: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the establishment of city technology colleges—not least among them, Brooke CTC in Corby—provides a model for the future normal state schooling system? Will he take urgent steps to ensure that the spread of city technology colleges is accelerated as quickly as possible? I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's school technology initiative, and hope that he will favour Our Lady and Pope John school in Corby for funding under that scheme.

Mr. Clarke: I am closely following the progress of Brooke CTC, the site of which I visited only recently. I know how popular and successful it has become. I agree with my hon. Friend that the next important consequence to flow from the CTC programme is that the benefits of all the curriculum development work undertaken by CTCs will spread to the rest of the education system. The technology initiative is an important element in that.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Whatever the difference of view held across the House, given that CTCs are funded by public money, will the Secretary of State take urgent steps to give parents whose children are refused admission to them the same right of appeal that is available in respect of all other publicly-funded schools?

Mr. Clarke: I view CTCs as exemplifying the principle of parental choice that operates in many other parts of the education system. I will certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's point, because it is our aim to put CTCs on a level with others in regard to funding and other aspects. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising such a point, rather than displaying the ridiculous opposition that we have seen from Labour, which still seems pledged to getting rid of some of the finest schools in the state education system.

State Schools, West Norfolk

8. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received in connection with state schools in west Norfolk.

Mr. Fallon: We have received representations about capital funding for several schools in west Norfolk. Earlier this month, I saw a deputation that opposed Norfolk education authority's proposals to close Bradenham voluntary controlled primary school, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard).

Mr. Bellingham: Will my hon. Friend the Minister pay tribute to the professionalism of Norfolk teachers and in particular to those who work in small, rural primary schools? He will be aware of the important role that such schools play in local communities. Will my hon. Friend confirm that, unlike the Labour group on Norfolk county council, he believes in small primary schools? Will he confirm that, provided they can deliver the national curriculum, they will continue to have an important role in modern education?

Mr. Fallon: Yes. I am happy to pay tribute to those teachers and to the well-run Norfolk education authority. It was one of the first to introduce local schools management, which paved the way for a series of applications for full grant-maintained status.

Special Schools

10. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make increased provision for special schools.

Mr. Fallon: The local authority finance settlement for 1991-92 allows for local authorities in England to spend nearly £17·5 billion on education—16 per cent. more than the 1990-91 settlement. The settlement for 1992-93 allows for spending of over £18·7 billion, a further increase of 7 per cent. Given good management, that should be sufficient to enable LEAs to provide for children with special educational needs.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware of the special need in all such schools for nursing cover of the kind currently provided through the health authority? Is he further aware that many special schools, including the excellent Weston Park school in my constituency, are worried about the threat to that cover? If it is not to be provided by the health authority, will the Government give an assurance that the schools themselves will be empowered and funded to offer the nursing care that children with special needs require?

Mr. Fallon: I shall certainly consider that point. Total spending per pupil on special schools and related provisions is currently running at a level four times higher than on pupils in ordinary mainstream schools.

Mr. Haselhurst: Is my hon. Friend aware that needs and expectations in regard to special types of education seem to be rising all the time? It is felt that resources do not always match every kind of special need that may occur, especially in rural primary schools. Does my hon. Friend consider that it is time to take a fresh look at the whole question?

Mr. Fallon: It is for local authorities to allocate their priorities. We have encouraged those who introduced local management of schools first to look again at their schools, and to ensure that the right balance exists between the funding of secondary schools and that of primary schools.

Cleveland Schools (Maintenance)

11. **Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the level of expenditure on maintenance for Cleveland's schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: None, Sir.

Dr. Kumar: Is the Minister aware that Cleveland's schools need a £50 million maintenance programme? His Department has not allocated a single penny to that programme for 1992-93. Is that part of the disgraceful, phoney citizens charter?

Mr. Fallon: As I increased Cleveland's capital allocation from £2·9 million to £3·8 million, I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman says. Indeed, the allocation for improvement work in Cleveland's schools has risen from £90,000 this year to £1·4 million next year.

Mr. Harry Greenway: When considering the principle and amount of funding for schools in Cleveland, will my hon. Friend also consider the funding of schools in Ealing? Today, the Department approved grant-maintained status for five schools in wealthy, middle-class and less wealthy areas in that borough. Are we not being taught the lesson that parents want independence for their schools—whether or not they are in the state sector—because that is the best way of achieving the best possible education for children in Ealing, Cleveland and everywhere else?

Mr. Fallon: Indeed. I congratulate those schools on obtaining grant-maintained status. Ealing has led the way, and I hope that it will not be too long before other education authorities such as Cleveland follow.

Mr. Fatchett: Is it not sad that no Cleveland Conservative has been able to come and represent the children of Cleveland today, and that that task has had to be left to a Conservative from Ealing?

Is the Minister aware that 18 schools in the Cleveland authority area were built before 1914 and that in the current financial year Cleveland has received only a quarter of its capital allocation? It is therefore not surprising that thousands of children in Cleveland's schools are being taught in sub-standard conditions—which must have an effect on education standards. Is it not about time that the Government invested in Cleveland's schools? Or are we seeing yet another example of the application of double standards, with Ministers providing no money for the public sector, while sending their own children to school in the private sector?

Mr. Fallon: I do not see how either the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) can describe the £3·8 million allocation for Cleveland as "no money". The plain fact is that there are steps that Cleveland should be taking to improve the way that it manages education spending. Cleveland has some 20,000 empty school places, and spends some £80 per pupil on its central administration, while only £40 per pupil is spent across the border in North Yorkshire.

Seven-year-olds (Testing)

12. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the results of testing seven-year-olds.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The national and local results of the tests of seven-year-olds which I published on 19 December give, for the first time, a clear picture of how our seven-year-olds are performing.

We should remember that over 70 per cent. of seven-year-olds did reach the targets for that age in English, mathematics and science. However, the wide fluctuations in the performance of individual local education authorities cannot be fully explained by variations in social and economic circumstances or by variations in spending on education, and show that there is plenty of scope to improve standards.

Mr. Squire: My right hon. and learned Friend will know that school children in my borough of Havering came fifth overall in the national listings. That is a considerable achievement.

Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that my local Labour party is circulating a leaflet, from which I shall now quote—

Hon. Members: No quotes.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Paraphrase, please.

Mr. Squire: In deference to you, Mr. Speaker, I shall do so.

According to the leaflet, testing at seven is harmful and impractical. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that our talented children deserve better than a Labour council, let alone a Labour Government?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is certainly right. The publication of the results allowed tribute to be paid to the local authorities whose results were good and where the hard work of teachers was showing results. The publication of results need not be taken as a threat to a good education system. I also share my hon. Friend's regret that some people still seem to think that one can teach a national curriculum sensibly without testing children's progress in an organised fashion. I am astonished that for so long we decided that the results of such tests should be kept secret from the public. It is a great pity that such reactionary ideas are still harboured by the Labour party in Havering and elsewhere.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I am glad that the Minister recognises that the results confirm previous studies—including those by Her Majesty's inspectorate—that most children, teachers and schools are getting or offer a good education. Will he commission a report to consider in detail and with expertise the fluctuations to which he referred rather than, as he has, jumping to his own conclusions about why such fluctuations should exist? After all, some areas include children with special needs and some do not; in some areas children have English as a second language and in others they do not; and, as he admits, teachers have had problems with the tests themselves. Will he commission such a report?

Mr. Clarke: I do not think that we have had such a clear picture before of the extraordinarily wide variations between different parts of the country. I believe that the publication of these results will cause people to focus on the reasons for the low standards in some places, except for hon. Members representing Bradford and Newham—the two lowest scoring local authorities—whose reaction is that one should not have such testing and that it is merely a problem forced on the local authority. The report that I commissioned to get a debate going on why some schools were failing was commissioned from three people whose expertise has not been challenged and nor, as far as I know, have most of their conclusions. However, I agree with the three wise men and with the hon. Gentleman. The vast majority of teachers are working extremely hard to achieve good results under the national curriculum and our aim is to get all schools up to the standards of the best.

Dr. Hampson: Did my right hon. and learned Friend notice that last summer the independent report into Leeds primary schools showed clearly that the schools that had had enhanced resources and more teachers could not show a positive correlation between extra resources and higher standards and, moreover, that the report highlighted the problem of teaching methods? It said that far too many teachers had the perception that unless they followed the good practice set down by local authority advisers, their career prospects in the city would be blighted.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend. The report by Professor Alexander into the Leeds primary school experience should be read carefully by anyone who is interested in primary school methods. There was a project that led to considerable extra expenditure in primary schools which was closely steered into the dogmatic application of a version of teaching methods and which had harmful consequences in schools. It showed not only that there was no correlation between expenditure and results but that the rather ridiculous pursuit of ideology involving child-centred education led to a reduction in standards because of the pressure on teachers.

Mr. Straw: Is the Secretary of State aware that according to figures provided in a parliamentary written

answer by the Minister of State about the proportion of seven-year-olds reaching the highest level of attainment —level 3—Labour-controlled Haringey is equal top and that Labour-controlled Merton, Camden and Hackney are in the top five placings, streets ahead of Tory Wandsworth which is the source of so much dogma about Tory education policies? Will the Secretary of State now applaud those London Labour boroughs for their excellent results?

Mr. Clarke: When I announced the results I paid tribute to places such as Wigan and St. Helens—[HON. MEMBERS: "And Hackney".]—and to Hackney if the figures are accurate for level 3 attainments. The hon. Gentleman resisted publication of the information on which he now relies. He reduces it to this petty party political level and then he makes excuses for all the lowest-performing local authorities, which are Labour-controlled, and resists any idea that we should address the teaching methods that have so badly let down children in Newham, Bradford and all the other areas in the bottom 20, almost all of which are Labour controlled.

University Teaching Buildings

13. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consultations he has had with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals regarding capital expenditure on new university teaching buildings.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals from time to time on a range of matters, including the capital and recurrent funding needs of the universities.

Mr. Morgan: Is the Minister aware that the Government are cramming more and more university students into the same buildings as a consequence of the fact that they are trying to have people obtain degrees on the cheap? Does he realise that, for example, in University college, Cardiff it is proposed to put an extra 1,000 students into the humanities building over the next three years? Does not he realise that there is a serious danger of recreating the student ferment of 1969? This time, however, it will not be about the great philosophical issues of class warfare and who should run the world; it will be simply about where students can sit to hear a lecture.

Mr. Howarth: Our policy is to promote wider participation and more opportunity in higher education. At the same time, we are asking for reasonable management efficiency gains on the part of institutions. University capital investment in 1992-93—money provided by the taxpayer—will amount to £216 million. By any standards that is a very significant sum.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Campbell: Is the Prime Minister aware that people in my constituency of Blyth Valley eagerly await the RECHAR money? As there is a split in his Cabinet will he get off his backside, stop swanning around that desert island and have the money paid?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the RECHAR money has been paid by Britain into the European Community and that we should have it back. I hope that Commissioner Millan will release it speedily.

Sir William Shelton: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we already see benefits flowing from the citizens charter? I refer, for instance, to shorter hospital waiting lists and to school performance league tables. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House what future benefits—proven benefits—the people of this country will see flowing from the citizens charter?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are determined to get the best possible value for the enormous amount of public money that is available at present. In addition to the improved information and guidance systems that we have already set up, there will be much more flexible opening hours in the case of tax offices, benefits offices and employment service offices, and a much more detailed and personal service for the taxpayer, who has the cost of those services compulsorily extracted in taxes from his or her pocket.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister now give a categoric assurance that he will not impose any increase in VAT? Will he please answer yes or no?

The Prime Minister: We have no plans to increase value added tax.

Mr. Kinnock: Why cannot the Prime Minister give a straight answer to a straight question? Is he aware that the words he has just used are exactly the same as those that were used by his predecessor just before her Government increased VAT? Why cannot he tell us now what his plans are? Or is he trying to forget that the Government have increased VAT five times in 13 years? Is not that why everyone has good reason to know that Tory Governments mean higher VAT?

The Prime Minister: There will be no VAT increase. Unlike the Labour party, we have published our spending plans and there is no need for us to raise VAT to meet them. So that the right hon. Gentleman is in no doubt, I tell him that I have no plans to raise the top rate of tax or the level of national insurance contributions.

Mr. Kinnock: It is time that the Prime Minister came clean with the country. In view of the record of Conservative Governments in always putting up VAT and in view of the Prime Minister's promises on other aspects of policy, how can he pretend that his intention is not to put up VAT? Do not a Tory Government make VAT rises a certainty?

The Prime Minister: Before the right hon. Gentleman carries that fib any further, does he recall a further and earlier prediction about value added tax? I quote:

"Labour foresees 60 per cent. VAT. VAT could rise to 60 per cent. if radical tax changes . . . are introduced by a new Tory Government."

The right hon. Gentleman may recall that prediction by his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) before the previous election. That was also the time when the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook claimed that Labour would win by a landslide in the 1987 election. He was wrong on both points then and he is wrong now.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Does my right hon. Friend agree —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down.

Mr. Bowden: Does my right hon. Friend agree— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bowden: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a party's commitment to public services is best judged by its record in government? Will my right hon. Friend consult our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to ascertain who controls the 20 authorities that have the highest community charge, the highest rent arrears and more vacant properties than any other authorities? Does my borough of Southwark feature among them?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a sound and fair point. All too often, Labour-controlled councils provide shoddy services at far too high a cost. I well recall the Opposition saying, "If you wish to see what a Labour Government would be like, look at Labour local government."

Mr. Ashdown: On the subject of predictions, and while the Prime Minister reflects today on the gloomy report by the Confederation of British Industry, does he recall on new year's day this year saying on Radio 4 that in retrospect, we would look back and say that the economic recovery had already started? In retrospect, does the Prime Minister agree that he might spend less time talking up false economic dawns and more time taking action for economic recovery?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is becoming a professional gloom monger. When we look back to the present, it will be perfectly clear that in many sectors of the economy, the recovery has indeed started.

Mr. Onslow: Does my right hon. Friend remember that when the investment income surcharge was abolished in 1984, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer described it as an unfair and anomalous tax on savings and on the rewards of personal enterprise? What would he say today to anyone who was stupid enough to recommit himself to reintroducing it, as Labour has done?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly find that extraordinary. I would find it even more extraordinary from a party that claims to care about investment, yet clearly has no understanding that investment comes from savings.

Q2. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Livingstone: Given the commitment in the citizens charter to parental choice in education, will the Prime Minister agree to meet a small delegation of parents from William Gladstone school which has an excellent academic record and an expanding roll but which faces closure as Brent council wishes to sell the school because of its site value?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will be happy to see the hon. Member concerned.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the greatest service he can continue to do for the British public is to keep inflation below 5 per cent? Is he further aware that the public remembers that inflation under Labour was 15 per cent., 20 per cent. and 25 per cent? In order to keep the level of inflation down, will he have a look at what is happening with the six major grocery chains, the increased share of the margins that they are getting and the fact that their margins are now twice the level found in the major grocery chains throughout Europe?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, inflation is low and we are determined that it will stay low. He will recall that inflation never fell below 7·4 per cent., and that for only a very brief period, while the Labour party was in Government.

I will certainly look at the point that my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Q3. **Ms Hoey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms Hoey: Before the Prime Minister retires to his desert island, taking with him his Trollope and a very large section of my constituency—without my permission—will he give a clear and simple statement about what he will offer to pensioners so that they can retire with some luxury? Will he match Labour's commitment to pensions?

The Prime Minister: A commitment to pensions means nothing if it is not matched by a commitment to low inflation.

Mr. Devlin *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member has not asked a question of the Prime Minister for many months, and not in this Session, unlike some other hon. Members, now shouting "Marginal seat."

Mr. Devlin: Has my right hon. Friend had an opportunity to look at the study in *The Financial Times* on 6 January which pointed to the fact that the northern region has very much benefited from the economic restructuring of the 1980s and is now coming out of recession faster than any other part of the country, due to the success of the regeneration programmes that the Government have put in place in the region?

The Prime Minister: I have seen that myself in visits to the north. There is no doubt that the north has seen the start of many good things in this country and I am certain that it will be the same again with the economic recovery.

Q4. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McKelvey: Can the Prime Minister confirm that last Wednesday he had lunch with Lord Rothermere? Did he take the opportunity on that occasion to co-ordinate the campaign of lies and vilification that the Rothermere press has been conducting against the Labour party?

The Prime Minister: I took the opportunity to enjoy an excellent luncheon. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Sir John Farr: As my right hon. Friend prepares himself for the important meeting with President Yeltsin later this week in London, will he take the opportunity of seeing what can be done to deal with the massive threat which still exists from all the different independent Russian states?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend says, this will be an important opportunity to discuss with President Yeltsin both the international difficulties posed by the break-up of the old Soviet Union and the extent to which the west might usefully help the Russian Republic in the difficulties that it faces at present. I anticipate that both those matters will be on our agenda.

Q5. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 28 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Grant: Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating Labour-controlled Haringey council and the children, teachers and parents of Haringey on the fact that our schools came joint top in English, maths and science in the level 3 standard assessment test and top in the individual subject of science? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that is a remarkable achievement, bearing in mind the fact that Haringey is an inner-London borough and has all the associated problems? Is not he ashamed at the remarks of his predecessor and of his ministerial colleagues who have constantly criticised Haringey's education policy and have cut its revenue support grant? Will the right hon. Gentleman see to it that Haringey receives an increase in its revenue support grant and standard spending assessment as a result of its excellent work in educating the children at its schools?

The Prime Minister: I am delighted to hear what the hon. Gentleman says. I am especially pleased to hear that he now supports the tests introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. I can tell from what he said that he is a strong supporter of the parents charter, without which those results might not have been fully known.

Mr. Conway: Will my right hon. Friend take time to congratulate British industry on the fact that it has achieved record exports in the past quarter, that 27 of the top 50 European companies are British and that Britain exports more of its national product than Japan? Are not those successful British companies sick and tired of being talked down by the doom-monger Labour party?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. Yesterday's trade figures showed clearly that export volumes were at record levels even in a worldwide economic downturn. My hon. Friend was also right about some Opposition Members talking down the economy. The Leader of the Opposition said in his letter to supporters at the beginning of this year that Britain had a £20 billion trade deficit, when the truth was that the deficit fell by a half and the right hon. Gentleman's figures were wholly wrong. Perhaps he will now write again to his supporters and correct his error.

Industrial Relations

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's legislative intentions, following the consultation on the Green Paper "Industrial Relations in the 1990s", which was published in July last year.

Like all our previous trade union legislation, the proposals that I am announcing today have two main objectives—first, to safeguard the democratic rights of trade union members within their unions and, secondly, to protect employees, employers and the community at large against the abuse of industrial power. Each of the proposals is carefully designed to meet a clear deficiency in our present arrangements, that has been acknowledged by many of the organisations that have commented on the Green Paper.

The CBI says in its response that its members

"warmly welcome the Government's continued commitment to reviewing the law governing the conduct of industrial relations".

The Engineering Employers Federation says that its members

"strongly support the Government's objective of providing a balanced and effective framework of trade union and industrial relations law"

and that

"the step by step approach has been seen by all to have worked successfully and it is right that it should continue."

The Institute of Personnel Management says—

[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down and listen to the statement, and I remind hon. Members that we have a busy day ahead of us.

Mr. Howard: The Green Paper, said the IPM,

"is primarily aimed at particular abuses which it is the duty of Government to address in order to protect the rights of the individual."

In all, we have had more than 100 responses to the Green Paper. These have come from employers' organisations, individual companies, trade unions and other organisations, and from individual people. The number of responses is in itself a clear indication of the interest the Green Paper has aroused and the importance of the issues it has raised. Most of the proposals it contains have been widely welcomed.

I deal first with the proposals to protect the public against strikes and other forms of industrial action. The first proposal was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his statement on the citizens charter.

We proposed in the citizens charter to provide a new right for members of the public in relation to unlawful industrial action which affects a public service. This proposal has been widely welcomed. At present, the employer has the right to bring proceedings against a trade union which organises an unlawful strike. Members of the public, who are usually the specific target of industrial action, have no such right. If the employer does nothing, the citizen is defenceless.

We therefore intend to introduce legislation to establish a new right for members of the public to seek an injunction to halt unlawful industrial action affecting a public service if the employer concerned fails to use the remedies available to him. This proposal has been widely welcomed. It will enhance the protection of the public, and it will be a further deterrent to unlawful industrial action.

The consultations have also shown that there is strong support for legislation to require trade unions to give seven days' notice of strikes. Strike notice is a well established feature of the law in other countries. This requirement will help to protect the general public against lightning strikes in the public services. It will also allow employers to take steps to safeguard jobs and businesses.

In addition, there has been strong support for the proposal to reduce the scope for intimidation and fraud by requiring strike ballots to be conducted by post and to be subject to independent scrutiny.

These measures will add significantly to the protection which our legislation already provides against strikes which are deliberately targeted on the life of the community. We intend to introduce legislation to implement all of them.

I turn now to the rights of individual union members. The first concerns an employee's freedom to join the union of his choice. Only last year we saw how building workers who left the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians when its leadership fell into the hands of the far left were prevented from joining the General, Municipal and Boilermakers union, even after the GMB had indicated that it would welcome them. That was clear evidence of how the operation of the Trades Union Congress's Bridlington principles can deny employees the chance to belong to the union of their choice.

Contrary to the claims of the TUC, only a minority of employers have expressed reservations about the change in the law that we propose to make. We therefore propose to introduce legislation which will give individual employees the right to join the union of their choice, free from interference from any arrangement between trade union bosses which is designed to deny them that choice.

The consultation also showed widespread support for the proposition that the law should not allow trade union dues to be deducted from an employee's salary without his or her individual consent. Since the Green Paper was published, there has been further evidence of the scope for abuse of check-off arrangements. On 8 December, for example, the *Sunday Times* reported that union subscriptions had been deducted from the pay of some 10,000 construction workers in London, but that these subscriptions had never reached their trade union. The case for reform of the law is clear.

Some employers have said that they believe that a requirement to review the check-off annually would be unnecessary and burdensome. I have therefore decided to accept a proposal from the Institute of Personnel Management that employers should be required to seek the consent of their employees to the check-off every three years. In addition, we propose to introduce legal safeguards which will ensure that in future no employee has union subscriptions deducted from his pay without his individual consent.

Again, no one has seriously questioned the need for further legislation to protect union members against the sort of financial mismanagement which was revealed in the Lightman report into the affairs of the National Union of Mineworkers. Nor is there any serious doubt that the law on trade union elections needs to be strengthened, in the

light of the ballot rigging in the 1990 elections for the national executive of the Transport and General Workers Union.

I have decided to adopt a suggestion which was put to my Department in the course of the consultation that unions should be required to employ a mailing house or some other external agency to distribute and store voting papers. This proposal is, I believe, the most effective way to ensure that electoral fraud of the kind which occurred in the Transport and General Workers Union is not repeated. I have also accepted the advice of a number of organisations, including the TUC, that, for security reasons, union members should not have access to the names and addresses of other union members. Instead, I propose that the independent scrutineer should be allowed such access on behalf of any union members who are concerned that the list may not be accurate.

The consultations have reflected a wide range of views on the proposal in the Green Paper relating to the legal status of collective agreements. There was both support for and opposition to the specific proposal on which we sought views. Some employers' organisations have put forward alternative suggestions. This is an important and complex issue. We shall continue to consider the scope for amending the law in the light of the comments that we have received and, if appropriate, we shall consult further before taking a final decision.

It should be clear to everyone that this has been a genuine and productive consultation. We have modified some of our proposals in the light of the views we have received. But the consultations have shown that there is widespread majority support amongst employers for a great majority of the proposals in the Green Paper.

The legislative plans that I have announced today are designed to consolidate and build on the improvement in industrial relations which we have achieved over the last 12 years. They will increase the rights of individual members of the public, individual trade union members, individual employees and the community at large. They will ensure that we have an effective and up-to-date framework of law in order to maintain that progress in the 1990s.

The clearest evidence of the progress we have achieved so far is our record on strikes. More working days were lost because of strikes in the last 12 months of the last Labour Government than have been lost in all the last five years put together.

No one should be surprised by that stark contrast. Before 1980, the law gave trade unions a virtually unlimited licence to organise strikes and industrial action, not matter how remote from the original dispute. There was no requirement for ballots before strikes, and the law allowed flying pickets to spread the disruptive effects of industrial action far and wide.

The choice before the House and the country is clear. On the one hand, there is the threat to roll back the legislation of the last 12 years, to put the trade unions back in the driving seat and make strikes easier, longer, more frequent and more damaging than ever before. That is the policy of the Labour party. On the other hand, we can carry forward the process of reform and build on the achievements of the last 12 years.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Howard: That is what the decisions which I have announced today will do, and that is why they deserve the support of the House.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): Let me deal with the main points of the statement item by item. On the seven-day cooling-off period, it is correct, as the Minister says, that there are similar provisions in other European countries, but will he confirm that, in those countries where there is a cooling-off period for unions, there is also a cooling-off period for employers? Is it his intention to legislate even-handedly for both?

Secondly, as for ballots before strikes, surely the important requirement is independent scrutiny of the ballot, whether it is postal or workplace. May I put it to him that the danger of his proposal of making workplace ballots illegal, which is what he is proposing, even where there is independent scrutiny, is that the participation level is lower for such ballots? Since he had the gall to suggest that employers' organisations all support the proposals, may I put it to him that this and many other parts of his provisions were vehemently opposed by employers' organisations, including the CBI, the British Association of Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Personnel Management?

Let me read to the right hon. and learned Gentleman what the Engineering Employers Federation said:

"Our experience is that provided they are properly conducted"—

the very point that I am making—

"secret workplace ballots are not subject to harassment and have additional beneficial features. EEF experience is that workplace secret ballots have a significantly higher level of return than postal ballots."

Thirdly, as for members of the public suing in respect of unlawful action in the public sector, will the Secretary of State confirm that unions have no immunity now for unlawful action in respect of public services and, that, although there may be some doubt about it, the only decided case in law held that the public already have the right to sue in respect of action that affects them?

On the fourth part, relating to Bridlington, the Minister proposes legislation. Six months ago, we put to him the problem of single-union agreements and he dismissed it. The CBI, the British Institute of Management and the Institute of Personnel Management have all put to him the same point about single-union agreements. Will the Minister comment specifically on that?

While we are on the subject of "joining the union of your choice", will he ensure that the security guards who are presently members of the Transport and General Workers Union and the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, employed by the Ministry of Defence, are allowed to continue as members of the union of their choice and are not ordered into another——

Mr. Howard: We shall allow it.

Mr. Blair: The Secretary of State can confirm that when he speaks. If, however, he believes in the right to a free and independent trade union, let him grant that right to the employees at the Government communications headquarters, who have been denied it for the past eight years. Let him also take action against the Economic League, which prevents that right from being exercised by many people.

[Mr. Blair]

The Secretary of State gives a wholly misleading account of how check-off operates. Will he confirm that it operates only if there is prior written consent on the part of the employee—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to those below the Gangway that the debate takes place at this end of the Chamber.

Mr. Blair: Will the Secretary of State confirm that check-off already requires the prior written consent of employees and that, contrary to what he has just said, an employee can withdraw his consent to that at any time? Legally enforceable agreements formed the main part of the Secretary of State's original proposals. I gather that that issue has now been kicked into touch. Perhaps we shall hear no more about it.

The proposals are significant not for what they do but for what they omit. If the purpose of the statement is, as the Secretary of State says, to protect individuals against the abuse of industrial power, why does it contain scores of rights exercisable against trade unions, but not a single right to a British employee, male or female, exercisable for fair treatment by the employer at the workplace?

Why is Britain the only country in Europe that does not give legal protection to our 6 million part-time employees? Why is Britain the only country in Europe with no right to a minimum holiday entitlement? Why does Britain have the worst maternity rights, the fewest equal opportunities and the least protection against poverty pay? If the purpose is to protect the individual, why do we not sign the European social charter, as every other country is prepared to do?

The Secretary of State's proposals are not for the sake of better industrial relations but, for the sake of the worst prejudices of the Tory party. Can there be a more telling difference between the day when the CBI has confirmed the depth of the recession, unemployment is rising faster than in any other European country, we have a training and skills crisis, which the Government are making worse daily, and the fact that the Conservatives are returning to the agenda of the 1970s because they have no answers to the problems of the 1990s? That may have worked in different circumstances in a different decade, but in 1992 the people of this country look for something better. They will get it under Labour.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has huffed and puffed, but he has not told us the Labour party's position on a single proposal contained in the Green Paper. When I announced the Green Paper last July, the hon. Gentleman said that he would examine our proposals carefully. In November, I wrote to him pointing that the formal period for consultation was ending and I asked when we might hear his response to the Green Paper. I have heard nothing. This afternoon, he has treated the House to an extraordinary collection of half-truths and inaccuracies, but he has not told us the Labour party's attitude to the proposals that I identified in the statement.

On ballots, the hon. Gentleman quoted what one of the employers' organisations said about workplace ballots and its proviso that they should be properly conducted. There is always the risk with workplace ballots that they will not be properly conducted, which is why we think that it is infinitely preferable to have postal ballots. The hon. Gentleman did not explain the Labour party's attitude to that.

On the protection of members of the public, the hon. Gentleman said that a case had been decided, but that there was some doubt about the position. If he agrees that the position is as we think it should be, why does he not say that he agrees with the proposals in the Green Paper, which we intend to put into legislation?

On the right of trade unionists to join a trade union of their choice, the hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten that even Bill Morris, the general secretary-elect of the trade union that sponsors the hon. Gentleman, has said:

"today when we are about choice and opportunity for the individual there is no choice in this matter or opportunity within them".

Ron Todd, the present general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, has said:

"All I want, quite frankly, is the right for a worker to determine the union he wishes to join".

The hon. Gentleman is behind even the leaders of the trade union that sponsors him.

I can certainly confirm on the specific point that the hon. Gentleman raised that those workers who work at the Ministry of Defence can continue to be members of the union of their choice. That is the answer to the specific question that was put.

Mr. Blair: They can carry on as members of the TGWU?

Mr. Howard: They can certainly carry on. That was never in doubt. The dispute, of which much has been made, I regret to say, by some ill-informed members of the Labour party, was about recognition, not trade union membership.

On check-off, the hon. Gentleman said that we could not have that now unless individual trade unionists gave their consent. He is wrong about that, too. There is no such provision in law, and that is one of the things on which we shall legislate.

The most extraordinary feature of the Opposition's response has been the deafening silence of their principal spokesman in relation to the proposals. There are two explanations for that. First, the hon. Gentleman is terrified of saying anything that would upset his trade union paymasters; secondly, he is afraid to do anything that would remind the electorate of the chains that bind his party to those paymasters—the bosses of the trade unions.

When he is challenged about the Opposition's attitude to trade union legislation, the hon. Gentleman says that that is a matter of public record. It is indeed. The hon. Gentleman is on record in the House as describing ballots before strikes as

"a scandalous and undemocratic measure against the trade union movement".—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1983; Vol. 48, c. 210.]

The shadow Chancellor has described strike ballots as an "irrelevant effrontery". The Labour party has opposed——

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have heard nothing disorderly.

Mr. Flannery: The right hon. and learned Gentleman, Mr. Speaker, is making a second statement. He has already made a long statement, and you are letting him get away with it.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is answering the questions that were put to him. If I cut him short, there will be complaints about that.

Mr. Howard: The Labour party has opposed every trade union Bill that we have introduced since 1979. Opposition Members have persistently evaded questions about their plans to repeal that legislation, but they have been more forthcoming about the new powers that they have promised the trade unions, including powers to force employers to recognise and negotiate with trade unions——

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Allow me to deal with this, please. I do think that the Minister is going a bit beyond the statement now. He should confine himself to the questions put to him.

Mr. Howard: The lengths to which the Labour party will go to rush to the defence of its trade union paymasters whenever this issue is raised are remarkable. The truth is that it is this party and this Government who have consistently sought to defend employees and trade union members over the past 12 years, and that is what the country will bear in mind when we come to the general election.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Flannery: The Secretary of State's answer took five minutes!

Mr. Speaker: Please do not shout at me.

I believe that it is desired to deal with consideration of the Prison Security Bill by 7 o'clock, and we also have a 10-minute Bill this afternoon. I shall therefore allow questions on this matter, which I understand will require legislation anyway, to go on until 4.30 pm; then we will move on. I ask for brief questions, and I ask hon. Members to try to keep off party-political point scoring.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, had this legislation been in place in 1984, my constituents would have been spared all the corruption and theft in the National Union of Mineworkers and the harassment and intimidation in the strike that took place that year? Will he also confirm that we are in danger of all this excellent body of legislation being swept away should the Labour party win the general election?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Others will have noted the way in which Labour Members stormed out while my hon. Friend was pointing out the extent to which the rights of her constituents would have been protected had this legislation been in force at the time —and the extent to which those rights would be endangered if the Labour party came to power.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Nichol Stephen (Kincardine and Deeside): There are——

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Faulds: My point of order is simple: have you, Mr. Speaker, no control at all over the misuse of the Government Front Bench that occurs when the nastiest man in Government abuses it every time he appears at the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, I do not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw".] I heard an unparliamentary word, and I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw it.

Mr. Faulds: Of course I withdraw the word, but the fact still applies. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down. It would be helpful to the whole House if we could deal with this important matter of trade union legislation in a non-party-political way.

Mr. Stephen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My colleagues and I would agree with several points in this statement—for instance, in relation to balloting of trade unions, where the Secretary of State will be aware that my party was ahead of the Government with reform proposals. However, we are worried, perhaps most about the timing of today's statement, which was purely party political—an attempt to put the heat on the Labour party, with a motivation that is entirely negative.

That is to be regretted. My party would have preferred to welcome a fundamental reform of industrial relations in a statement that introduced greater employee participation, greater encouragement of employee-management buy-outs and more profit-sharing. The statement ignores all that. [HON. MEMBERS: "What is the question?"]

So my question is, does the Secretary of State agree that what is required is legislation and a statement from him to bring together the two sides of industry in this country and to encourage co-operation between employer and employee? Is not the motivation behind the right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement simply party politics rather than any deep desire to see both sides of industry engage in greater co-operation?

Mr. Howard: May I allay the hon. Gentleman's anxieties about the timing of the statement? Having issued a Green Paper in July and assessed the responses to the consultation in which we engaged following the publication of that document, we have a duty to the House to report the outcome of that consultation process to it and to make clear our intentions. That is what lies behind the statement. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government have taken unprecedented steps over the past 12 years to encourage employee participation and management buy-outs. Many of the matters to which the hon. Gentleman referred complement the proposals that I have announced.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is it not a remarkable fact that the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has now apparently conceded that the industrial relations law reforms that have been introduced by this Government have worked? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that they have been largely responsible for the huge

[Mr. Tim Smith]

increase in inward investment in this country? Is it not right that we should build on that with the proposals that my right hon. and learned Friend has announced?

Mr. Howard: In my experience, one should treat any apparent concession by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) with great caution. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's second point about inward investment. Survey after survey has shown that one of the vital advantages that attract inward investment to this country is our new atmosphere of stable industrial relations and our strike-free record. We must build upon that to take advantage of the opportunities that will be available to us in the 1990s.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is it not all rather sad and entirely predictable that, in the run-up to a general election, the Government are indulging in an exercise of union-bashing? As there is no time for any of this stuff to be enacted, is this not a wholly transparent and competely shoddy and tacky exercise in electioneering? Instead of looking to the past, why does the Secretary of State not look to the future and note that all successful industrial countries regard the trade unions as valuable partners with whom to co-operate?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman, who is sponsored by SOGAT, again asks about the timing of the statement——

Mr. Leighton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Howard: I answered a previous question about the timing of the statement——

Mr. Leighton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State should have some knowledge of these matters, but he has said that I am sponsored by a union that does not exist.

Mr. Howard: I perhaps should have said SOGAT 82. The hon. Gentleman asked about timing, but I answered the question about timing that was raised by the hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Stephen) on behalf of the Liberal Democratic party. Each of the measures that I have announced today is designed to deal with a particular abuse that needs to be dealt with. The Labour party's Front-Bench spokesman was not prepared to deny that, or to say that his party disagrees with the actions that I propose.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), with whom I have a great deal in common, has just suggested that we should look to the future. What would my right hon. and learned Friend think of the future if his Department was in the hands of somebody who has described a trade union ballot as

"a scandalous and undemocratic measure against the trade union movement"?—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1983; vol. 48, c. 210.]

Mr. Howard: That is exactly what the hon. Member for Sedgefield said about union ballots, and that is the kind of future—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Not true.

Mr. Howard: Oh yes, it is all on the record. That is what the country could look forward to if the Labour party won the election and the hon. Member for Sedgefield were to occupy my office.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Is it not clear that my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement will be widely regarded as a fair, sensible and logical step forward in our trade union legislation, and that many people will contrast it favourably with the chaos that would follow a return to the 1970s-style legislation advocated by the Labour party? In particular, will not the proposal to allow union members to join the union of their choice be a significant restraint on extremist trade union leaders who will otherwise face the mass exodus of their members to unions that more accurately reflect the aspirations of their members?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend, who has considerable experience of these matters, has correctly identified one of the advantages of that proposal. It is noteworthy that, while my hon. Friends have been prepared to comment and give their views on the proposals that I identified in the statement, all that we have heard from the Labour party is a generalised rant.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Does the Secretary of State not understand the simple point that giving people the right to join a union of their choice is meaningless unless the union of their choice has the right to negotiate on their behalf? Will he accept that most people in those circumstances would prefer to join a union with such a power? Why is he not introducing a provision that applies in many other European countries and that ensures that the union that represents, within a company, a majority of the people whose jobs are appropriate to that union has a guaranteed legal right to be recognised as the negotiator?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman, who is sponsored by the Transport and General Workers Union, confuses the right to join a trade union with recognition. Under the proposals that I have announced, any trade union member will be able to join the union that has recognition rights at that workplace. Increasingly, there are many other reasons why workers wish to join trade unions. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that fact.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): As a Member sponsored by the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union, I can tell the Secretary of State that many thousands of members of my union expect him to turn what talent he has to increasing employment—a far more important priority than this window dressing for election purposes.

I wish to explore a point of detail. Did the Secretary of State say that the members of a union should be allowed to decide for themselves whether the check-off system should be applied to their wages, because some of the money taken in check-off had never reached the unions? If that is so, the money must have remained with the company that checked off the wages. Even if employees decide to have this system, how does that protect them from the company stealing from the unions?

Mr. Howard: No, on the last point. If the hon. Gentleman reads the report in the *Sunday Times* of 8 December, he will see that there was no question of the money staying in the hands of the employer or of the

company on that occasion. It was diverted from the trade union for which it was intended. Therefore, it was diverted not by the employers but by those who collected it—those to whom it was entrusted by the employers.

I want to deal with the important point raised by the hon. Gentleman, that about jobs. Perhaps the most important contributor to an environment in which we can create jobs and employment in the 1990s, after the conquest of inflation, is the creation of stable industrial relations and a strike-free economy. That is what the Government have achieved, and that is what would be destroyed by the election of the Labour party.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Did my right hon. and learned Friend note the extraordinary contrast between the angry, non-constructive outburst by Labour Back Benchers and the articulate vacuum of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) who, to paraphrase W. S. Gilbert, is a man who says nothing in particular and says it very well? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that much of what has been achieved over the past 12 years might be at risk if we were to find ourselves governed by a party whose 233 existing Members of Parliament include 155 who are sponsored by trade unions?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree. The hon. Member for Sedgefield is good at putting a covering of thin tissue over the raw nerve that is clearly exposed whenever Labour Back Benchers speak on that subject.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): As a Member of Parliament sponsored by the National Union of Mineworkers, of which I have been a member for 58 years —having joined it before the Secretary of State was born —I am extremely proud of its traditions and history. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposed legislation is neither an industrial relations charter nor an industrial relations Bill, but an anti-trade union Bill.

The Secretary of State flings charges about paymasters. In the shoddiest display that I have seen from a member of the Government Front Bench in 26 years, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is introducing a Bill on behalf of his paymasters. There must be a change of Government, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman and people like him must be defeated.

Mr. Howard: The Bill will protect the people. It will protect ordinary members of trade unions. I invite the hon. Gentleman to cast away his slogans and to consider the detailed provisions that we propose, which are designed to remedy specifically identified abuses. If the hon. Gentleman will do so, with his background he will recognise that steps must be taken if ordinary citizens and trade union members are to enjoy the protection that they properly deserve.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on extending real choice to individual workers, so that they may decide for themselves whether or not to belong to a trade union—and which trade union they join. Is it not the case that Labour has opposed every item of this Government's trade union legislation, and cannot be relied upon to look after the interests of individual union members?

Mr. Howard: It is certainly the case that Labour has opposed every trade union reform that we introduced over the past 12 years. This party and this Government will continue to do whatever is necessary to protect individual members of the public and trade union members, so that they are not bullied and taken advantage of by those who have more power than they do.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The Secretary of State made his statement today with the same air of intense sincerity that he adopted when he introduced the poll tax. Perhaps I may test the sincerity of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement that he wants to respect individual rights. Will he approach the Secretary of State for Defence, who unilaterally decided to withdraw Transport and General Workers Union negotiating rights from those employed at COD Donnington in my constituency—who, for the whole of their working lives, have served this country's defence industries through their work in depot security?

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that it is entirely ludicrous for him to claim that he will continue to recognise the individual's right to be a member of a trade union when that union will cease to have negotiating rights? Will he approach the Secretary of State for Defence about that matter, so that we may see whether or not there is any sincerity in his commitment?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman genuinely misunderstands the position. There was a reclassification of the workers concerned, and the group into which they were reclassified is one for which the National Union of Civil and Public Servants traditionally has recognition rights. That union's general secretary said:

"it should also be accepted that, since Ministry of Defence security guards are now regraded as non-industrial civil servants, NUCPS has negotiating rights in that area."

The workers concerned can continue to be members of the unions to which they have always belonged, but the logic of the reclassification is that the NUCPS should have recognition rights.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-West): The Green Paper that gave rise to today's statement also included the proposal that trade union leaders' salaries and perks should be declared, so that union members could see where their subscriptions were going. If that is still my right hon. and learned Friend's intention, does he agree that union members should also know just how much is being spent on the sponsorship of Labour Members, including all those in the elected shadow Cabinet?

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend suggests, it is still our intention to legislate on the basis of the original proposal for the disclosure of salaries of trade union officers. I did not mention that in my statement, because it has aroused little controversy or disagreement. As for my hon. Friend's suggestion about the sponsorship of Members of Parliament, it is certainly an intriguing thought; at present, however, we have no plans to legislate in that regard.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): Do not the Secretary of State's attacks on the trade union movement, his manipulation of the television coverage of today's statement and the use of the race card represent the policies of discredited regimes? I am reminded of the 1930s. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is Dr. Goebbels incarnate: this is a squalid statement from a squalid Minister.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman, who is sponsored by SOGAT '82——

Mr. Litherland: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is no such union as SOGAT '82.

Mr. Howard: I am relying on the Register of Members' Interests for information about the hon. Gentleman's trade union membership.

Mr. Litherland: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is taking up time. I think that the House accepts that there is no such union, if the hon. Gentleman says that that is the case.

Mr. Litherland: Let me put the Secretary of State out of his misery. My union is the Graphical, Paper and Media Union.

Mr. Howard: No doubt that information will reach the Register of Members' Interests in due course.

The point about the hon. Gentleman's question is that, like other questions from Labour Members, it was couched in generalities—not very agreeable generalities, but generalities none the less. When will the Labour party address the specific problems that gave rise to the Green Paper and the solutions that we suggest are appropriate, so that we can improve the protection given to ordinary members of the public and ordinary trade union members? That is the purpose of our proposals.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): As my right hon. and learned Friend will know, today's announcement will strike a chord with the majority of the British people—hence the unreconstructed gibberish that we have heard from Labour Members.

Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, towards the end of last year, thousands of my constituents were caused considerable inconvenience and distress by unofficial action on the Fenchurch Street line? The management of British Rail did not have the guts to do anything about it. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his statement will offer hope to my constituents? Once the new laws that he proposes have been introduced, those constituents will have the opportunity to do what British Rail's management are too gutless to do.

Mr. Howard: My proposals would certainly cover the circumstances described by my hon. Friend. No doubt he will draw his constituents' attention to Labour's reaction to those proposals, and will make it clear to them that we, unlike Labour, are prepared to act to protect them.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): As a former trade union officer, I get the impression that the Secretary of State has never worked in industry in his life. I used to deal with union members who were on the check-off system, and not once was a check-off allowed to be taken from a person's wages without that person's express permission. Members also had the right to end the facility whenever they wished.

The Secretary of State suggested that money might not reach a union after a check-off system had been imposed. I challenge him to hand over his facts to the police: that would be fraud, and would bring not only employers but trade unions into disrepute. Because of Tory legislation, employers in my constituency are starting people but sacking them after two years so that they are outwith the employment legislation, and then restarting them the following day.

If the Secretary of State is interested in the rights of workers, he should ensure that he is in favour of rights for every worker and does not merely attack the trade unions. In addition, he should get the unemployment down in my area, because it is a disgrace.

Mr. Howard: I remind the hon. Gentleman, who is sponsored by the Manufacturing Science and Finance Union, that it was a Conservative Government——

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it about sponsorship? I think that we have heard enough about that.

Mr. Watson: Is it in order for the Secretary of State to refer continually to the trade unions by which hon. Members are sponsored without pointing out that, like the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) who is feeding him the information, he is a director of one company and a consultant of two others? He gets paid for that, but we do not get personal money from sponsorship——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sponsorship of all kinds is in the Register of Members' Interests. This takes up a lot of time.

Mr. Howard: I thought that members of the Opposition were proud of their links with the trade unions, but I was dealing with the point raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray). I remind him that a Conservative Government first introduced the right to obtain compensation for unfair dismissal, and he should bear that in mind.

On check-off, he said that, to his knowledge, employees —trade union members—were asked at, I think, regular intervals for their consent. That is not a universal practice. If that is a practice of which the hon. Gentleman approves, surely he will approve of this proposal to make it a universal practice and ensure that individual trade union members have the opportunity to give their consent at regular intervals. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is a good idea, why does he not support the proposal?

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Sponsored by Lloyd's.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, just as the Opposition opposed every piece of this Government's trade union legislation, they will begin by opposing this legislation tooth and nail, but that they will then go rather quiet and perhaps do a rather shifty U-turn when they see how well it works, as they have done with previous legislation?

Mr. Howard: I am not as optimistic as my hon. Friend. When the Opposition pretend to do a U-turn, one is well advised to look at the small print. One then finds that there is an appearance of a U-turn but that the small print would take things back to what they were in the 1970s. That is the Opposition's position, and we must ensure that everyone understands that.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does not the Secretary of State realise that today he has done a great disservice to the development of industrial relations by the nature and

timing of his remarks? Does he realise that, by moving from the Green Paper to proposals for legislation which he well knows cannot possibly be achieved in the lifetime of this Parliament, he is undermining the rights of trade unions? Why can we not have a White Paper which would include the possibility of considering trade union immunities, the rights of workers—women and part-time workers—and minimum earnings, so that we have an overall picture to ensure that industrial relations in the 1990s are not the victim of cheap electioneering by those on the Front Benches?

Mr. Howard: Surely the hon. Lady will agree that, having issued a Green Paper and received responses to that consultation exercise, it was right that I should report the outcome and the Government's intentions to the House. I had a duty to do that. If the hon. Lady is against such proposals as giving members of the public the right to stop unlawful action, against providing for seven days' notice of strike action and against giving individual trade union members the right to give their consent before money is taken from their pay packet, I can understand her hostility to the proposals. If she is not against those issues, she should support them.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the measures he has proposed build on a long list of enhancements of the rights of ordinary trade unionists? To see that this is so, we need look no further than back to the miners' strike, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) referred, when the might of the National Union of Mineworkers was successfully tackled in an action started by one ordinary mineworker with all the legal assistance of the high street solicitor who conveyanced his house.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend recognises that all the great advances in this area have been won by individuals prepared to stand up for their rights. The purpose of these proposals is to help those individuals. That is why we want to take them forward.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): For the avoidance of doubt, will the Secretary of State, accepting that there is another arena for party political broadcasts, tell the House what he thinks about the situation in which a majority of the work force at a single place, having been free to join any trade union, are in one trade union but the employer refuses to negotiate? What would the Secretary of State say to those employers, employees and trade unionists? What advice and legislation is he providing for them?

Mr. Howard: What I would say is that that is a matter for them to resolve and that when, in the past, attempts have been made to introduce legislation to govern these matters, they have been a lamentable failure. The provision in the Employment Protection Act 1975 that represented the last Labour Government's attempt to introduce such a right was repealed in 1980 at the request of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service because it was found to be totally unworkable.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that these proposals are a sensible extension of the kind of legislation that, over the past 12 years, has buttressed the position of individuals, both inside and outside trade unions? Does he agree that it is a gross indictment of the Labour party that it has opposed every single piece of industrial relations legislation which we have introduced over the past 12 years, and which have given us a strike record that is the envy of Europe and far below the European average?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend correctly identifies the difference between the two parties. It was Opposition Members who supported legislation that was responsible for the mob rule of the 1970s and the closed shop, with all its consequences for individual liberty. There is no point in the hon. Member for Sedgefield frowning: he knows perfectly well that that is what happened in our country during those years. It is from that fate that the Conservative Government have rescued the country.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): The Secretary of State will be aware that Sunderland contains the headquarters of the North of England building society, whose employees have twice voted, in secret ballots organised by the Electoral Reform Society, to join the very moderate Banking, Insurance and Finance Union. On both occasions, the management have told the employees to get stuffed. Does the Secretary of State have any plans to give those employees any rights as citizens, or is this all a fraud?

Mr. Howard: I said a few moments ago that previous attempts to legislate on this matter had failed miserably. As a consequence of the legislation that I have mentioned, it was discovered that there is no workable way of providing rights of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I tell the Secretary of State that I am very proud to be sponsored by the National Union of Public Employees, and not by Greek fascists? Can he tell me how this statement will help the workers —trade unionists—at Coloroll in my constituency, who at an industrial tribunal won the right to more redundancy pay but 12 months later have not received payment because his Department does not have civil servants to process the claims? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell me where those people will get jobs, given the horrendous rise in unemployment in my constituency?

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Lady writes to me about the particular case to which she has referred, I shall certainly look into it. We have taken steps to try to ensure that the period for which some people have had to wait for redundancy payments is kept to the absolute minimum.

As for the prospect of those workers finding other employment, I hope that the hon. Lady will reflect that one of the best ways in which we can encourage the creation of more jobs is to create a strike-free environment. Our reforms have contributed greatly to the achievement of that objective. The legislation introduced by the party that the hon. Lady supports had precisely the opposite effect.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The Secretary of State describes the statement as aiming for the protection of millions, but is it not a fact that he is talking not about individuals and their rights but about the level of profit that employers make out of the weakness of trade union rights which almost 13 years of his Government have brought about? More than 200 Tory Members are sponsored by those employers.

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

The Secretary of State prattles on about the level of trade union wages. For almost 20 years, I have said that trade union leaders should, as I do, take only the wages of the average member they represent. The 200 Tory Members refuse year after year ever to declare the level of their directorships or their consultancy fees, and who pays them for what they say in the Chamber. The weakness of people's rights is not a problem caused by trade unions being too strong. The reason is that the powers of collective action have not been used often enough in the past 10 years to rein in the Secretary of State and his Government.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman's views are well known. I suspect that they are shared by a number of Labour Members far greater than the number who will own up to the fact. I fear that the hon. Gentleman's views would lead to consequences opposite to those which, I am prepared to concede, he genuinely desires.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet at the moment. I remind the House that questions to the Department of Employment may be tabled today for answer on 11 February.

Points of Order

4.32 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It will delay matters. I ask hon. Members to raise points of order——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Please sit down. I ask hon. Members to raise points of order with which I can deal and not questions that might have been directed to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point relates to Prime Minister's Question Time. I do not know whether mathematics is one of your strong points, and I do not expect an answer to the point today, but you will have noticed that the first five questions to the Prime Minister on the Order Paper today were tabled by Labour Members. Can you explain to the House how it was possible for seven Conservative Back-Benchers to be called? Only the five Labour Members who had tabled questions were called. That is an almost impossible situation to create.

Mr. Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman is usually very helpful and I am quite good at mathematics. It is unusual for all the questions on the Order Paper to come from one party, and it does not help the Chair. The Leader of the Opposition asked three questions today, and a member of one of the minority parties was called. That is why Conservative Members were able to ask seven questions—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is challenging your ruling."] It is not a challenge; I am giving an explanation. I say to hon. Members who shouted earlier, "Marginal constituency", that these days many constituencies are marginal. I seek to call Members who have not asked the Prime Minister a question this Session. Those who have do not stand quite such a good chance.

Mr. Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No more, Harry.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I know of your concern for the reputation of the House. So that there is no misunderstanding, would you, from your knowledge of debates and interventions when you have been in the Chair and before, confirm that, when sponsorship is involved —almost every time Labour Members asked questions, the Secretary of State for Employment responded "Sponsored, sponsored, sponsored"—literally not a single penny goes into the pockets of hon. Members? We are not ashamed of our involvement. I have been involved in my own union now for 40 years, and proud of it, but not a single penny has ever gone into my pocket, or ever will.

Will you also confirm that, in the case of hon. Members on the Government Benches, where there are business engagements, involvements and the rest—90 per cent. of Tory Members are involved in such matters—all the money goes into their pockets? That is the difference.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me to comment on, but all these matters should be declared in the Register of Members' Interests.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Going back to the statement of the Secretary of State, I have no doubt that it is the presence of television cameras which persuaded him not just to make a statement but to wrap it up in such a way that it was like a party political broadcast. I do not think that it does the honour of the House any good whatever for a Secretary of State to conduct business in that way, and I think that you should use your good offices to restrain Secretaries of State who abuse the House as this Secretary of State has done.

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for whether or not statements are made. If the hon. Member feels strongly about it, it is a matter for the Select Committee on Broadcasting and he should draw it to the Committee's attention.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: And a final point of order.

Mr. Skinner: You said last week that you were concerned about balance and impartiality in the run-up to the election. You showed obvious concern, and we all understood. What I suggest is this. Can you make arrangements, to provide some balance to what we have had today, something which has passed its sell-by date, for us to have a statement, from anybody—we will do it on the Opposition side—which looks into moonlighting by 250 Tory Members and then into the Economic League and the Freedom Association? To top it off, we can look into the freemasons as well.

Mr. Speaker: I think that we will move on.

Animal Experimentation (Cosmetics)

4.36 pm

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to prohibit the use of animals in the development and testing of cosmetics.

The Bill would end animal testing for cosmetic purposes. I am asking the Government to give offical support to a view that is widely held by hon. Members and their constituents.

In the 1988-89 Session, more than 300 hon. Members from all parties signed early-day motions calling for an end to animal testing for cosmetic purposes. A recent survey showed that more than 50 per cent. of Conservative Members and more than 75 per cent. of Opposition Members supported such a ban. Some 85 per cent. of people interviewed in a recent opinion poll felt that this type of animal testing was unacceptable. That strength of feeling was reflected in last November's rally in Brussels, when 4,000 people from all over Europe protested against it, lending support to the 2·5 million-signature petition which was delivered to the European Parliament. Support from Members of the European Parliament was so strong that the Parliament is likely to recommend a ban soon.

At home, the Prime Minister was drawn into the debate when, in a letter dated 27 November 1989, he admitted to being a member of the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments, an organisation that seeks to find methods of research that do not use live animals. He said:

"The general public can play a very considerable part by refusing to buy cosmetics unless they are clearly stated to have been made without the use of tests on live animals."

What sort of goods are we talking about? It is not just colour cosmetics such as face powder, eye shadow and lipstick but a host of everyday toiletries. How many hon. Members could look round their bathrooms and recognise those products: toothpastes such as Ultrabrite, Colgate, Blue Minty Gel, Mentadent and Signal; shampoos which include Alberto Balsam, VO5, Cream Silk, Head and Shoulders, Timotei and Silkience; other hair products such as Harmony, Clairol, Nice 'n' Easy, Glints, Sunsilk, Free Style and Recital; Deodorants such as Mum, Fresh and Dry, Right Guard and Sure; soaps such as Camay and Palmolive; and items such as Pond's cold cream, vaseline, Ambre Solaire and Cutex nail products?

At Christmas, how many bought loved ones cosmetics by Helena Rubinstein, Vichy or Lancome; stocking-fillers by Studio Line; and perfumes such as Safari, Fiji, Anaïs Anaïs, Armani and Shiseido? How many bought Cachet, Rave or Impulse? How much Lynx, Denim and Polo aftershave was bought?

Those are only some of the brand names of companies such as Alberto-Culver, Cheesebrough-Ponds, Colgate-Palmolive, Elida-Gibbs, Gillette UK Ltd., Bristol-Myers, Proctor and Gamble, L'Oreal UK Ltd. and Shiseido—all of them listed among the chief offenders in the animal-testing stakes.

L'Oreal, for example, while claiming that it prides itself on

"respecting . . . animals and avoiding any suffering and stress to them"

[Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie]

recently kept mini-pigs in solitary confinement for 14 months while it exposed them three times a week to ultra-violet light to test for sun damage to the skin. What price now that golden suntan?

In 1990, in Britain alone, more than 4,000 procedures for testing cosmetics and toiletries were carried out using live animals—mainly guinea pigs and rabbits—to say nothing of the huge numbers carried out by parent companies abroad.

What sort of tests are we talking about? One of the most inhumane must surely be the Draize eye test conducted on rabbits, which are pinned down to have substances dropped regularly into their eyes to see if they blister or bleed. Rabbits are chosen, of course, because they have very poor tear ducts and cannot wash away the substances easily. In 1990, 300 such tests were carried out.

Another common test for skin irritancy is where a rabbit or guinea pig has its back shaved and a substance rubbed in it and it is held in place for weeks on end. Sometimes the rabbit's back is roughened up with hypodermic needles or sandpaper. Often, the results are cracked skin, blistering and bleeding.

Do we really need to use animals at all to test cosmetics and their ingredients. The answer is no. There are plenty of alternative and more reliable methods. Computer models, chemical models, reconstructed skin tests, the use of isolated skin tissues and human volunteers can all be used to test for irritancy, allergy, cancer risk and exposure to light.

Add to that the fact that animal tests are unreliable, and the justification for using them vanishes. Comparative tests carried out at the Huntingdon research centre using mice, guinea pigs, mini-pigs, piglets, rabbits, dogs and baboons showed that the tests produced different results on different animals. So how can they be expected to produce reliable results for human use? As Professor Salzbury, researching for Pfizer, said when asked to comment on the reliability of animal testing:

"We would be better off tossing a coin".

At least there would be a 50:50 chance of being right.

There could perhaps be occasions when animal testing for medical reasons might be justified, so clearly a line must be drawn between products that are genuinely medical and those that claim to be medical—just because an ad man sells them that way. I am thinking of all the claims made for the various toothpastes, for example. In the same way, the British consumer is all too often conned because there is no legal definition of the term "cruelty-free" and no dictionary of acceptable ingredients such as the one that operates in the United States.

As more than 8,000 ingredients have already been established as safe to use, I suggest that the only excuse companies have to use animal tests to extend that list is profit. I contend that the need to protect innocent animals from the clutches of such international profiteers is paramount.

The current European campaign seeks to ban any cosmetic product or ingredient that has been tested on animals, and Britain can give a clear lead here. Under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, all procedures must be covered by a project licence. Section 5(4) of the Act allows the Home Secretary discretionary powers to refuse to grant a licence where he feels the adverse effect on the animals outweighs any benefits that are likely to accrue.

I therefore ask the Home Secretary to refuse to grant new licences for animal testing for cosmetic purposes, as there are already plenty of ingredients available for new products and plenty of equally—if not more—reliable methods for cosmetic testing. At the same time, I ask the Government to give a legal definition to toiletries and cosmetics so that they may not be confused with medical products. I also ask that a dictionary of acceptable ingredients be compiled so that the British consumer is protected against false claims when buying cosmetics.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, Mr. Don Dixon, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, Mr. Jimmy Wray, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. Frank Haynes, Mr. James Pawsey, Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Norman Hogg.

Animal Experimentation (Cosmetics)

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie accordingly presented a Bill to prohibit the use of animals in the development and testing of cosmetics: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February and to be printed. [Bill 59.]

Orders of the Day

Prison Security Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

OFFENCE OF PRISON MUTINY

4.45 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 1, line 8, leave out 'two' and insert 'six'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this, it will be convenient to take the following: amendment No. 5, in page 1, line 9, leave out from 'prison' to end of line 14 and insert

'together use or threaten violence for the common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority in that prison.'.

Government amendment No. 7.

Amendment No. 8, in page 1, line 15, leave out subsection (3).

Government amendment No. 9.

Mr. Sheerman: It is with some pleasure that I rise to speak to the amendment, partly because the present Bill differs in important respect from that which entered the Standing Committee. Since the Bill came out of Committee, the Government have undergone something of a conversion to the views expressed by the Opposition in Committee and have conceded one of our main objections to the Bill on Second Reading.

The purpose of amendment No. 4 is simple. Under the Bill as drafted, the offence of prison mutiny can be committed by just two people. As I speak to the amendments, to which I shall refer by number, I shall be explaining that the Government have made an important concession. We do not underrate that concession but we remain unhappy with one or two aspects of the Bill and we hope to secure more changes in it before it completes its passage through Parliament. This is not the time to gloat but, being a politician, I feel that I must say that we told the Government that the Bill was imperfect and required important modifications. Our arguments were so persuasive that we attracted some allies from the Conservative Benches.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that not only Opposition Members were responsible for persuading the Government, and that I may have played my part in the changes? I have some cause to gloat.

Mr. Sheerman: I take that point. The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) and I will both have a little gloat and then get on with discussing amendment No. 4, the purpose of which is to improve the Bill still further.

We left the Standing Committee thinking that, if the Government made a concession, the first concession that they were likely to make would be that embodied in amendment No. 4. In Committee, the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West argued persuasively that the number of people whose involvement constituted a prison disturbance or mutiny should be more than two. The Minister of State promised to think seriously about that. As the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West pointed out perceptively, if the figure is set at two, what two or three prisoners get up to in a cell could be construed as a riot under the Bill, and the 10-year penalty could be incurred. We were therefore somewhat surprised that the Government had not moved on the numbers question.

Today, we offer the Government an honest compromise of not 12 prisoners but six. It would be a very positive step if we could agree on six, which is a more sensible number than two. We argued in Committee that the number was too low and suggested that 12 would bring it into line with the offence of riot in the Public Order Act 1986, which also carries a 10-year prison sentence. The Minister was unable to accept that suggestion, but said that there had been forceful argument in favour of a lower number and that she would reconsider the matter. We have not heard the result of that reconsideration. Perhaps when the right hon. Lady gets to her feet she will give us some more positive news. Six seems to us to be the number that reasonable people trying to improve the Bill and to reach an accommodation could accept.

The reason behind the precise wording of the amendment is twofold. First, the notion that two people could commit such an offence in a prison seems far-fetched in the extreme. We have to pinch ourselves sometimes to remind ourselves that this Bill was considered necessary as a result of the Strangeways riot. The Government, again, got their response out of proportion to what had occurred. This was a crisis; a ghastly wave of prison riots and disturbances and the Government had every right to be concerned and to do something about it. But to do something about it in this particular way seems to us to resemble the personal imprint which the right hon. Gentleman the Secretary of State seems to have imposed on the Home Department.

We have a domestic crisis—it may be dogs one day, a prison riot on another, political refugees on another, the number of offences of taking and driving away cars on another—and the Home Secretary thinks up yet another piece of instant legislation that he can whip through the House of Commons, because we do not seem to have much of a legislative jam at the moment. We have a small, speedy piece of legislation to react to every ill.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: I will just finish my point; then I will give way.

A Bill comes to the House, goes to Committee, we get to Report, and in some cases deal with Lords amendments, and then the whole thrust of the legislation is changed. We saw it on the question of political refugees, with three major amendments, last week; we saw it in terms of the dog legislation; and we shall see it, I predict, in terms of the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill We have seen it now, with a glitzy piece of legislation to get the press headlines. When the Bill gets serious scrutiny here, it is shown to be what it is—a fancy, rather than a serious, piece of legislation.

Mr. Cash: I served on the Committee with the hon. Gentleman and, before he got to the Floor of the House where a bit more attention might be paid to what he was saying, he made a number of rather reasonable and constructive attempts to improve the Bill in his own way.

[Mr. Cash]

Now, however, he is just trying to make cheap political points. He is implying that there is no real need for these proposals. He acknowledged in Committee, by the way in which he approached the proceedings then, that the Bill was necessary. It really is not good enough for him to try to make cheap political points. There is no substance whatever in the line that he is taking.

Mr. Sheerman: You are long enough in the tooth in this place, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am, to know that a cheap political point on one side is seen as a valuable political contribution on the other.

In Committee, our job as Her Majesty's Opposition, very soon to become Her Majesty's Government, is to take these matters extremely seriously. We try to fulfil our role very seriously indeed, as we will when we are Her Majesty's Government. I would not be doing my job as Opposition spokesman on this issue if I did not give the general context of our resistance to, and our pledge not to go in for, short, sharp bits of legislation in every crisis. This Bill has to be seen in that context. Our job as the Opposition is to try to improve this legislation. The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West knows that. That is what we tried to do in Committee and what we will continue to do today. We do the work of transforming a nutty, ill-considered piece of legislation into something that does not disgrace the country or the Government.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman persists in saying that this legislation has been brought forward rather quickly. I remind the hon. Gentleman that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's predecessor proposed that there should be such legislation. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this is not a reaction to a situation which has grown in a very short space of time. It is a well considered and, as I hope he will admit, necessary piece of legislation to deal with the situation within prisons. Without it, we shall not be able to achieve some of the other reforms that we want.

Mr. Sheerman: I do not agree with a word of that. The legislation is ill considered. It was seen to be necessary to do something in terms of Strangeways. The right hon. Lady knows the argument, but I will rehearse it for her very briefly.

An intelligent and serious response to the Woolf commission report would have been a thorough look at the way in which our penal system, under her Government, has fallen to pieces. Instead, we get a cheap-jack piece of legislation that deals not with the real problems but only with the superficial situation. The Opposition deplore that kind of legislative response.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): The hon. Gentleman is digging himself into a very deep hole. I must assist him, because it is cruelty to animals, almost. He has said that the Government have reacted irresponsibly in all these measures. We shall take the opportunity to remind the country, when the election comes, that the Opposition have tried to water down and reduce the impact of all the recent measures that we have introduced. He mentioned the Asylum Bill. His party voted against that Bill last week.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. We have had some pleasant exchanges in the run-up to this amendment. We must now get back to the amendment before us.

Mr. Baker: I will restrain myself from reminding the House about the Asylum Bill and about how the Opposition voted against the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill, but I will remind the House that they have jibbed at the present Bill as well. They have always said that this measure is not necessary. I can assure the House that this measure is necessary to deal with unrest in our prisons, as my right hon. Friend will make clear in a few moments.

Mr. Sheerman: I have only one riposte, Madam Deputy Chairman——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have been very tolerant. We are dealing with amendments. The amendment stands in the hon. Gentleman's name and I hope that he will continue to debate it.

Mr. Sheerman: I will say only that the reason why we are critical of the Government is that they have failed, on the question of law and order, to bring law and order to this country. We want substantial legislation and substantial action, not these bits and pieces of legislation. Our people want to live in peace. The Government will not allow them to do so.

We are interested in the Government accepting amendment No. 4 to improve this legislation. It would change the numbers. We have rehearsed the arguments reasonably well and we have been joined by members of the Committee on both sides in asking the Government to consider this. It does seem to be an absurdity that only two people need to be involved for an incident to be deemed a riot, and we shall be pressing the amendment very strongly indeed.

Mr. Ashby: The hon. Gentleman knows that I argued for a larger number than two in Committee, but that was when there were subsections 2(a) and (b). Once (b) goes, we are left with this very strong offence indeed of overthrowing lawful authority. It is not just a minor matter; it is a very big matter. It is not the sort of thing that would be the result of just sitting in a cell; one does not conduct oneself in such a way as to overthrow lawful authority by just sitting in a cell. Prisoners would not just sit there saying, "Wouldn't we like to do this, wouldn't we like to do that?" What is required is unlawful conduct. In those circumstances, should not the number be as in the general law of conspiracy, where it is two or more for most offences? Because we have concentrated on a big offence, is it not time to drop the requirement for six, or four, or 12 and be content with two, given the enormous change of mind by the Government, which I gloat over because it was the result of my persuading?

5 pm

Mr. Sheerman: I thank the hon Gentleman for his intervention but cannot agree with him, because the small number is still a worrying aspect of the Bill. He put his finger on it extremely well in Committee, when he said that the Bill was a mish-mash. Sometimes one wonders about the Home Office. Obviously, the Home Secretary or Ministers asked for a Bill to serve a certain purpose. As we explored the Bill in classic fashion, what we found was a mish-mash between public order and the notion of riot.

The Bill takes from other legislation the offence of mutiny in the armed services. Every time the right hon. Lady got into a discussion on it, it became clear that the drafters of the legislation had never made up their minds whether the Bill was about prison mutiny or prison riot. In Committee, we tried to make it clear that the two were not the same. It might be applicable to say that two people in the armed services refusing to fire on the enemy as the enemy advanced were committing mutiny, because only two could be detrimental to good order in a regiment in a battle situation. That is understandable.

Can one imagine two prisoners running amok in a prison and causing a riot, whether they run amok in their cells or outside? That is the point on which the Minister failed to convince us. I still believe that the Bill could be improved in that regard.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): The hon. Gentleman is making a fair argument, but surely two prisoners engaging in a disturbance could quickly become four prisoners, then six and then eight. As we saw in the riots in Strangeways, these incidents escalate very quickly. Surely two is a sensible number.

Mr. Sheerman: Knowing his record on the Government Benches, I thought that the hon. Gentleman was intervening on the basis of being an expert on mutiny. He makes a fair point that two soon becomes four and then six. We say that the trigger number is probably more sensible at six, which can be identified more realistically.

We have had the concession from the Government in regard to two people doing something non-violent. On the other hand, two people acting even in an obstreperous way might fall under the legislation when their behaviour did not amount to riot, mayhem or disorder. We are trying to make a positive point.

The second reason for the amendment was given in Committee not just by the Opposition but by the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West. The number of people who can be guilty of mutiny must be higher than the number living in one cell. I hope that the right hon. Lady will come back on that. It would be wrong for behaviour in a cell to be caught by the legislation and to carry the maximum sentence of 10 years. Because of the cramped conditions in which three men may share a cell, difficulties can arise which should not fall foul of the legislation. We are offering a compromise in suggesting that the number be six. I hope that the Government will accept the amendment in the spirit that we are not tied to six, but think that two is too few.

Amendment No. 5 goes to the very heart of the difference between us on the Bill. We are trying to ensure that the offence of prison mutiny consists of actual violence or the threat of violence to overthrow lawful authority in a prison. It is a measure of the extent to which the Government have lost their way in the Bill that the Opposition should need to propose the amendment.

The Bill was conceived as a response to the appalling scenes which we witnessed at Strangeways and other prisons. No one denies that we should be protected from that mayhem and disorder and that public property should be protected from such damage. Those scenes were characterised by violent behaviour and enormous destruction.

It is such incidents which we are all concerned to eradicate and which concern the public. The original intention of the legislation was to tackle just such incidents. However, that intention seems to have got lost in drafting. In Committee we were told repeatedly by the Minister of State that the Bill was dealing not with riot, which was what we were all concerned about, but with mutiny. I can refer the right hon. Lady to her words if she wishes.

In introducing the concept of mutiny from legislation dealing with the armed forces, the Government have changed the whole purpose of the Bill. As originally drafted, the Bill would have encompassed a wide range of non-violent protest, for which the draconian penalty of 10 years' imprisonment would have been inappropriate.

The Government's decision to accept in Committee the Opposition amendment to remove subsection 2(b) was an enormously important change and removed the part of the Bill which we found most objectionable. I do not have to repeat my welcome for that, but that welcome change did not go far enough.

The offence of prison mutiny can still be committed where no violence, or threatened violence, has taken place. When we discussed the matter in Committee, both my colleagues and the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West continually pressed the Minister to give an example of behaviour which would warrant an offence of mutiny in which no violence or threat of violence took place. The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) may be interested to know that what we were trying to find was a non-violent offence that would fall into that category. I do not believe that anyone in Committee was convinced by the examples that the Minister gave.

The right hon. Lady found herself in enormous difficulty. We heard of improbable situations in which prisoners strolled into communications rooms and, completely peacefully, refused all attempts by prison staff to move them. We had examples of prisoners sitting down or not going back to their cells, or collectively sitting in a room because, according to the Minister, they were

"disgruntled, unhappy and wish not to undertake to obey the lawful order of the prison."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D, 19 December 1991; c. 41.*]

Those are incidents which occur frequently in prisons and which officers are trained to handle. That is their expertise. Such incidents are dealt with currently under rule 47.19 of the prison rules, which makes it a disciplinary offence for a prisoner to disobey any lawful order. Such behaviour does not warrant a 10-year sentence, nor is it behaviour about which the public is concerned.

As the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West said in Committee:

"We should not allow the sort of offences that are dealt with under rule 47.19 . . . to be included here. We must be sure to draw a clear line between those two sorts of offences so that we can deal with serious cases such as those that we have seen in the past 12 months. I am not sure that the clause is very helpful. In every serious case that we consider there is violence or the threat of violence."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 17 December 1991; c. 35-6.]

It is absolutely necessary for the element of violence to be present.

It is the Opposition's view that legislation must be precisely phrased. Clause 1 is still open to abuse. It could be used for behaviour which is non-violent and simply does not warrant an offence carrying a 10-year maximum. Our amendment would ensure that the new offence was focused on the sort of behaviour about which we are all greatly concerned.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): Will my hon. Friend confirm that we are not concerned purely with the precision of the Bill? Lord Justice Woolf was concerned that the prison system should be part of the system of justice and that prisons must be seen to be run justly. Will my hon. Friend confirm that we are principally concerned that the Bill would mean that prisoners were treated unjustly?

Mr. Sheerman: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for bringing me back to Lord Justice Woolf and the principles that underlie the arguments that we made in Committee. I was taking that for read and also saving it up for my Third Reading speech. However, I happily concede that point to my right hon. and learned Friend.

I am delighted that the Government have decided to accept amendment No. 7, which we moved in Committee. At that time we received a frosty response to it. Clause 1(2)(b), which the amendment removes, was the most worrying aspect of this badly drafted Bill. The wording was vague and the type of behaviour that it encompassed was so wide that it could have covered an enormous range of non-violent protest and disobedience. To take the point that my right hon. and learned Friend has just made, it would have led to a feeling of injustice if it had been used for such offences. Tragically, it would have led to a reaction that could, ironically, have produced the very behaviour to which the Bill intends to put an end. Therefore, the words

"collectively resist, impede or disobey any exercise of lawful authority in the prison in such circumstances as to make their conduct subversive of order in the prison."

required no intent to overthrow lawful authority and could have covered a handful of prisoners protesting about prison food, refusing to work, or being involved in a peaceful protest about their innocence. I shall not labour the point but simply welcome the Government to the world of common sense.

Amendment No. 8 seeks to remove clause 1(3), which provides that prisoners' intention and common purpose is to be inferred from their conduct. In other words, the mens rea or mental element of an offence does not have to be proved by the prosecution. I shall explain that provision under the watchful eye of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer). In English law, it is usual for the prosecution to have to prove not only that the conduct took place but that the defendant intended it to occur or was at least reckless of the consequences. Under the Bill, there is no need to prove that a prisoner intended to overthrow lawful authority in a prison. That would be less important if the offence were limited to violence or the threat of violence, but the clause is still unsatisfactorily vague. It can still cover non-violent protest and, in those cases, the prisoners' intentions will be very important.

The amendments hang together, and their coherence is important. Our argument in Committee was a coherent response to the Bill. We said that, if that subsection remains in the Bill, other parts must be changed to compensate for the earlier mistake. By arguing that the non-violent aspect must be removed from the Bill, we argue that subsequent amendments must also be accepted. I hope that the Minister of State will see the clarity of purpose in our tabling of those amendments and wishing to hold them together.

5.15 pm

Although the problem would be less important if the offence were limited to violence or the threat of violence, the clause can still cover non-violent cases, in which case the prisoners' intention is not only important but it is vital that it should be known. Prisoners may simply be involved in a protest about conditions or alleged miscarriages of justice and the prosecution should have to prove that they intended to overthrow authority in the prison. To leave their intention to be inferred from their conduct is a recipe for miscarriages of justice.

Those are the main amendments that we have tabled. We feel some satisfaction that the Government have given way on a fundamental part of the Bill to which we objected. That is a major victory for common sense. If the Government would now see that the three other amendments are consequential to that major concession, we shall improve the Bill, if not this afternoon, by the time it returns from another place.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I wish to do what little I can to help my right hon. Friend the Minister of State to get the Bill on to the statute book. I was interested in the points raised by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). I am confident that the Bill is not just window dressing.

Gartree prison is in my constituency and most of the prisoners there are lifers and even multiple-lifers. The Bill has limited relevance to such prisoners. Whether two or six prisoners are assembled, whether they

"use or threaten violence for the common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority in that prison".

or whether we accept amendment No. 7 has little relevance to life prisoners.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has always been frank about such matters and I hope that she will recognise that the Bill is tailor made to deal with specific problems. I do not see how life prisoners will be affected by any of the amendments. Will my right hon. Friend deal with that point? She may say that the Bill should not apply to prisons such as Gartree, in which case I recognise that there is a need elsewhere. It would have been improper for me to allow the amendments to go through without making that brief comment.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The Government's concession in amendment No. 7 seems to call into question the need for the Bill. It changes the Bill fundamentally, and gave rise to considerable concern among prison governors about the damage that the Bill might inflict on prison discipline. To impose such draconian penalties on those who merely disobey or impede the exercise of lawful authority in the prison makes the Bill an obstacle rather than an assistance to good order.

As the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said, the fact that the Government have withdrawn that offensive and dangerous subsection is a triumph for common sense, but that raises the question of what is left in the Bill. The Bill relates to circumstances that are adequately covered by the existing law on conspiracy. I am at a loss to understand why public order offences, coupled with the charge of conspiracy, are not considered by the Government to be perfectly adequate to deal with outbreaks of violence or the threat of violence, which leads to the breakdown of order of the kind that was manifest at Strangeways.

I have been driven to the inevitable conclusion that, in introducing the Bill, the Government were seeking a cheap headline. That was their response to the disturbances at Brixton and Strangeways. The introduction of such little Bills is a form of boutique shopping.

Mrs. Rumbold Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House how many prisons that he has visited recently have just experienced disturbances?

Mr. Maclennan: I have not recently visited a prison that had experienced a disturbance. However, just as the Secretary of State for Education and Science did not think it necessary to visit a single primary school during the first six months he was in office to be able to pronounce on education, I did not consider it necessary to visit a prison, particularly as prison governors are perfectly capable of expressing their views. In any event, their views are much better informed than mine, which are formed on the basis of a casual, short visit to a prison where a disturbance has taken place. Perhaps, unlike the Minister, I listen to what the prison governors say.

On Second Reading, I specifically asked what representations had been made by the prison governors, but the Minister patently avoided answering me. She must know that the Bill is extremely unwelcome to the prison governors because they see it for what it is—a cheap attempt to grab the headlines in the tabloid press to suggest that the Government are doing something about prison disturbances.

Mr. Soames: I must take exception to the hon. Gentleman's ludicrous line of argument. If he really believes in his case, he should make a much better fist of it. It is just possible that the prison governors, who are a very fine body of men, may be wrong. For many years, since the Prison Officers Association virtually took over the running of prisons, the prison governors have not been in a position to exert the authority that they should. For the hon. Gentleman to suggest that prison governors are not in favour of the Bill is plainly not true.

Mr. Maclennan: I took the trouble prior to Second Reading specifically to ask the Prison Governors Association whether it welcomed the Bill or had invited the Government to legislate. I was told that it neither welcomed the Bill nor had invited the Government to introduce it.

It is not a matter of asking me for my view. The Government have the results of the inquiry into prison disturbances under Lord Justice Woolf and we have also had the most authoritative prison survey in a decade from Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, Judge Tumim. Not one line of that extensive report suggested that draconian measures of the kind contained in the Bill were necessary.

I do not expect Conservative Members to pay the slightest attention to what Opposition Members say, but I expect them to pay attention to what their own chief inspector of prisons and their own inquiry into prisons said. There is not a whisper of support for the Bill, which I would call friendless, from any quarter that is knowledgeable about prisons. That is scarcely surprising. The Government have introduced an amendment to remove the offensive part of the Bill dealing with a non-violent situation. It is clear that there is nothing left in the Bill that cannot adequately be dealt with by the present law on conspiracy or the public order legislation, which the Government recently went some way towards codifying.

The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Huddersfield refers to a pretty vacuous Bill, which is more print than substance. It is unlikely that the Bill will be used a great deal. One must accept that if troubles occur that lead to the possibility of lawful authority being overthrown, they might have come about as a result of the action of two prisoners, or of fewer than six. I cannot see the logic in the suggestion that six is the right number to include in the Bill. Whether a conspiracy, as I would call it, has the potential to overthrow lawful authority depends entirely on the resources that are available to the two people.

Mr. Sheerman: The answer to the general principle of the amendment is the classic one that "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do". I chose the figure six as a negotiating ploy. My view on that number is not hard and fast, nor would I be bitterly ideological about it. I am entirely pragmatic. We chose the figure six—we could have chosen another. The hon. Gentleman was not fortunate enough to serve on the Committee, but we had a general discussion and we chose that figure so that the Minister could go away and chew on it.

Mr. Maclennan: I, too, have a pragmatic turn of mind. The hon. Gentleman may allow the point that two prisoners could theoretically overthrow lawful authority in a prison, if they are provided with sufficient means of force. Two prisoners overthrew lawful authority when they escaped from Brixton. I take it that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that it would not be proper to use the Bill in those circumstances. I do not think that it is necessary to use the Bill in those circumstances because there are common law and statutory law provisions which would allow those people to be prosecuted.

If the Bill is to make any sense—it makes precious little —it does not make sense to pluck a number out of the air, be it six, four or eight prisoners. Two prisoners must be necessary to establish common purpose and a figure of two or more seems to be right.

I agree with amendment No. 8 and I hope that the Government will accept it, for the reasons that the hon. Member for Huddersfield gave. I need not amplify them.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I spoke on Second Reading and I followed the progress of the Bill in Committee, even though I was not a member of it. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said that "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do". I shall vote for the Bill on Third Reading and I will not require any help from the Whips to persuade me to do so. There is a valid argument in favour of the Bill.

I realise that on Second Reading much time was spent on the merits or otherwise of clause 1(2)(b). The Government are right to delete that paragraph because that makes the Government's intention much clearer. It was not the Government's intention to involve minor disturbances which perhaps would have been dealt with as disciplinary offences within the prison. We must recognise that some riots, such as that at Strangeways, were not spontaneous but the result of a detailed plan. Amendments Nos. 4, 5 and 8, tabled by the hon. Member for

[Mr. John Greenway]

Huddersfield, would seriously undermine the Government's intentions as envisaged in the Bill. The real problem——

Mr. Sheerman *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: If the hon. Gentleman listens to my argument, he will begin to understand.

The point about the Bill is that it does not refer to riots or to violence. We should attempt to deal with the problem that, behind the scenes, as few as two prisoners with a great deal of influence on many other prisoners may conspire and incite others to commit an act of mutiny and riot, even though they themselves may not engage in violence or "use or threaten violence"—the words that the Opposition amendment would introduce. Those words would be superfluous at best and at worst would undermine the purpose of tackling those who might incite a mutiny in a prison. We are interested in not only the violence, the destruction and the act of rioting but the initial conspiracy and incitement. I hope that my right hon. Friend will confirm that the Government intend to deal with those elements.

Clause 1 leaves us with a serious offence—the "overthrowing" of lawful authority, which I read as meaning a breakdown of control by prison staff over part or all of a prison. That is what happened at Strangeways; we have to tackle the planning of that sort of riot. That is why I believe that the Bill will strengthen the law on prison security. Opposition Members failed to point out the provisions of clause 2, which increase prison sentences for prison escapers as well.

5.30 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): In Committee and in this debate, hon. Members have expressed their anxiety about the lack of definitions and lack of clarification of detail in the Bill. In Committee for instance, we discovered that a prisoner found guilty of taking part in a mutiny could expect 10 years' imprisonment or could be fined, although the fine is not specified. Ten more years to a lifer or a fine for a prisoner with no income is fairly meaningless.

The same vague definition is used to describe the number of persons constituting a mutiny—"two or more". The Bill does not explain how that figure was arrived at. Reference to "The Concise Oxford Dictionary" only enlightened me to the extent that the number of such persons must be plural. It refers to a body of people in revolt, and to soldiers and sailors, although not to other members of the armed forces. Regrettably, the dictionary, like the Bill, does not provide an adequate explanation, and I am left none the wiser. I am sure, however, that if approached the compliers of "The Concise Oxford Dictionary" would compromise on the numbers constituting a mutiny. If they would be so willing, why are not the Government? How can we possibly decide how many prisoners constitute a mutiny or a riot?

Strangeways prison is in my constituency. As we all know, the biggest mutiny in British prison history took place there. The tabloid press informed us that more than 1,000 prisoners took part. Certainly, to judge by what I saw of its aftermath, two prisoners could not have done all that damage. How could we take all those prisoners to court? If they all got 10 years, that would mean 10,000 more years of imprisonment. In any case, how could we prove how many were responsible for inciting the mutiny?

I tend to agree with the Prison Officers Association that the Bill is irrelevant to attempts to end rioting. All in all, it will have little or no effect. I am not sure whether it extends to Operation Container, under which many prisoners are still held in prison cells in Greater Manchester—I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

The amendments introduce the idea of a threat of violence. Such a threat was used at Strangeways and, to a lesser degree, in the copycat riots elsewhere in the wake of Strangeways. The amendments attempt to define what would constitute a mutiny, in the shape of a threat of violence for the purpose of overthrowing lawful order in a prison. That puts some meat on the bare bones of what the Government are trying to do.

In Committee, the Minister of State claimed that prisoners might argue about, say, the colour of their bread. On 17 December, she said:

> "It may be argued that it is unreasonable to say that a prison mutiny begins when people sit down and refuse to eat food; it only starts when the prison officer has said, 'Look here, Fred and George, it is high time you went back to your cell' and Fred and George have said, 'No, we're not going back, we're going to sit here for the rest of the night' . . . Does violence always have to be involved? A prison may be disrupted by a refusal to conform with the authority that is essential to control a prison."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 17 December 1991; c. 25.]

Does arguing about the colour of bread or continuing to sit down constitute a mutiny? The Bill is vague on that point.

By making such comments, the Minister does a disservice to the governors and men and women who run our prisons. There are daily protests about bad food, clothing and conditions, and governors and staff become expert at quelling such problems. They use subtlety and persuasion to cajole prisoners into conforming. There are peaks and troughs in prisoners' emotional behaviour and the staff learn to understand them. Trust is built up. If a governor thought that refusal to eat brown bread were tantamount to mutiny and called in prison staff to give evidence, what would happen to the trust between prisoner and officer?

No governor would react in the way outlined by the Minister. The training and experience of governors allow them to find ways of dealing with tricky situations without reading the riot Act. It is our duty to protect staff from violence or the threat of violence, which is why I support the amendments.

Mrs. Rumbold: Amendment No. 9 is consequential on amendment No. 7.

I begin by explaining why my right hon. Friend and I are more than ever convinced of the need for this piece of legislation. It is not only we who are committed to it; the previous Home Secretary also gave a commitment, as did the White Paper, "Custody, Care and Justice", in which we sought to reiterate our commitment. We have not yet received any comments from either the Prison Governors Association or the Prison Officers Association. We shall certainly consider such comments as soon as we receive them, but I repeat that we have had absolutely no comments on the Bill from any of the people running our prisons.

I suspect that, if there had been the strength of feeling against the Bill that Opposition Members suggested, those who are allegedly against the legislation would have submitted written arguments. The only evidence that I can adduce in this regard comes from a visit that I paid in the last couple of weeks to a prison that has only recently been built with taxpayers' money and at vast expense. That prison was wilfully and disgracefully damaged by young people on remand, who came from the same part of the country as the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland). Both the Home Secretary and I found that behaviour thoroughly reprehensible, and it is in no way acceptable to the people of this country.

I have absolutely no doubt that this is an essential piece of legislation, and that the removal from it of part of clause 1 will focus the issue. We seek to remove the objection which the hon. Member for Huddersfield had about the legislation at one point—that the provisions might "capture" those people who are not as violent or difficult as the young people at Moorland who were responsible during the Christmas period for the behaviour to which I have just referred.

To that extent, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the way in which he has welcomed our amendments. I did not expect him to be capable of resisting the usual "Yah-boo, I told you so" reaction. That is too much to expect from the hon. Member for Huddersfield and, as expected, he did not resist it. None the less, it is important that we have established a clear and convincing resolution.

The Bill is an excellent piece of legislation. It will ensure that we have some redress against those people who think that they can act so disgracefully in our prison establishments, especially those that are newly built and in which we have emphasised the importance of making them more humane. We have heard enough about the importance of such establishments being humane. If we are to provide the humane establishments that I should like to see and to allow those who are responsible for running our prisons to have the establishment and discipline they need, we need this legislation on the statute book. The framework provided by the Bill is exceedingly important. I commend our amendments to the House.

Mr. Sheerman: The right hon. Lady has been most interesting. I accept her point and the kind words that she briefly passed my way. I am interested in the visit to Moorland to which she referred. Can she say, in a little detail, whether this legislation would have been used at Moorland in the recent disturbances?

Mrs. Rumbold: It would be injudicious of me to say anything about such a matter, because that raises a question about legislation that is not yet on the statute book. I have every confidence that, as soon as the Bill is enacted, the type of behaviour that took place at Moorland, about which people across the country will have read, will be addressed. I refer to youngsters who wilfully destroyed public property that was provided at vast expense and to behaviour that very much disadvantaged the young people themselves.

The Bill is therefore an essential piece of legislation. Even if it is not necessary to use the legislation, the very fact that it is on the statute book will prove an exceedingly important deterrent, because it clearly outlines the penalties that those who undertake such behaviour run the risk of incurring.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be quite wrong for an hon. Member—let alone a Minister—to express a view on whether an offence should be charged in respect of the recent disturbances at Moorland or any other prison, given that clause 1(5) requires that no proceedings can be brought

"except by or with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions."

5.45 pm

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I had not expected that I would necessarily be asked a sensible question by the hon. Member for Huddersfield. I was simply expressing a view that I know is widely held across the country about the exhibitions that we have witnessed not only recently but in previous years, when there was a disastrous series of demonstrations by inmates who showed scant regard for public property and for whether they were to be held responsible. Even if people are in prison, they have some responsibility for the way in which they conduct themselves.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister is right. It is disgraceful that people committed to our prisons should then proceed to act in that way, whether at Moorland or at Strangeways. The Opposition are totally against such behaviour and the destruction of property. Such occurrences are dreadful, and we seek the most effective way of stopping them.

However, we also want to stop the other dreadful things that have happened in prisons under this Government. I refer to the two prisoners who left Brixton, almost by courtesy and through the back door. Only today we have heard that a mafia boss who was sent to Springfield prison for five years and who has drug connections at the highest level has walked out of there. We want such things to be stopped and for the Government to do that effectively.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman is in favour of the Bill. That is the clearest declaration that I have heard to the effect that the Opposition deplore such behaviour and believe that some form of legislation is necessary. This is what we propose, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have no difficulty in accepting the Bill and that he will vote in favour of it when the time comes.

Mr. Soames: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the Labour party were to vote against the Bill, that would show what the people in the country already know—that Opposition Members are soft on law and order?

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Madame Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I refer hon. Members to the amendments that we are considering. This knockabout is all very amusing, but we are dealing with detailed amendments, which hon. Members should now address.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I turn now to amendment No. 4.

Mr. Maclennan: I should be most grateful if the right hon. Lady could amplify Government amendment No. 7. When apparently answering the question about the circumstances in which the Bill might be used, the right hon. Lady said that she had seen malicious damage that had been carried out by prisoners on remand. Are we to

[Mr. Maclennan]

take it that malicious damage by prisoners on remand is to be considered an offence that may haul down the penalties for mutiny? If not, why did she even mention that? What is its relevance to the debate?

Mrs. Rumbold: I do not think that the hon. Member knows a tremendous amount about what happens in our prison system. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) gave a perfectly sensible answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

I turn now to amendment No. 4, on which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland and I happen to agree. It relates to the minimum number of people who could be regarded as committing the specified crime. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Huddersfield later said that the number that he had selected—six—is arbitrary——

Mr. Sheerman: It is a negotiating number.

Mrs. Rumbold: I see that we are going to play with words. It is a negotiating number. The hon. Gentleman gave as his reason for this the fact that a man has to do what a man has to do.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) asked me why it was that Oppositions tabled amendments, and I said quite honestly that procedures make us behave in this way. We table amendments because that is the way to improve a Bill. That is what a man, or a woman, has to do.

Mrs. Rumbold: I cannot resist it, Madam Deputy Speaker. You and I know that a woman has to do what a woman has to do. I can adduce one or two arguments for believing that it is not necessary for us to accept the amendment taking the figure above two.

Mr. Sheerman: Perhaps the Minister should go away and think about it.

Mrs. Rumbold: I did go away and think about it. The hon. Gentleman asked me whether I recalled that, in Committee, I had said that I would go away and think about this and other related matters. I did indeed do so, and I decided that introducing amendment No. 7 would be infinitely preferable to accepting a change of number. I did this because it is possible to believe that an officer might have difficulty in quelling trouble created by more than two people. He would probably have difficulty in quelling six or even five. We have to choose a number, and, as the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland made clear, going above the number of two does not make a great deal of sense. Therefore, I am not particularly attracted to the amendment.

A second and more fundamental objection is that raising the minimum to six would make it a great deal harder to prove a common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority, which is the crux of the matter. It is a stringent test to prove that two people had a common purpose, and an infinitely more stringent test to prove that a greater number than two had a common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority. As the hon. Member for Huddersfield said, this was a negotiating point, but I am afraid that I am not able to accept his offer of negotiation on this point.

Amendment No. 5 not only deletes paragraph (b) but further restricts paragraph (a) by requiring the use or threat of violence before a charge of mutiny may be brought. When we discussed this in Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby), who sadly is not here now but who made a useful contribution at the beginning of the debate, was particularly concerned to limit the offence of mutiny to incidents involving the use or threat of violence.

Let me say immediately that I am almost certain, given my knowledge of what happens in prisons, that there will be an element of violence in the serious disturbances at which the Bill is aimed. In resisting this amendment, I am taking into account the fact that it can be very difficult to prove particular acts of violence against particular inmates in a prison and behind locked doors.

An incident may occur within a building where many inmates have barricaded themselves in. If, in spite of the evidence of widespread damage, it is not possible to prove the use or threat of violence against a particular inmate, this amendment would prevent any of those involved being successfully prosecuted for mutiny. I think that this is not what the hon. Member for Huddersfield intended.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale was anxious to establish the point that we are seeking to ensure that this serious offence is caught in future. A further point is that the ringleaders in the disturbance—those who instigate or orchestrate it—may not themselves participate in acts of violence. Therefore, it is important that they, who are as culpable as others, are not let off the hook. It is for that reason that I wish to resist the amendment tabled by the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Central was particularly concerned about the number of prisoners held in Manchester in a container situation. There are now 200 people in the police cells in Operation Container. That is not satisfactory, and the hon. Gentleman knows that we are doing everything we can to reduce the number, particularly as this is both expensive and an unsatisfactory solution, given that we feel strongly that the prison service should contain such prisoners.

I understand only too well the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr). A prison such as Gartree contains lifers—people condemned to prison for a long time—and it is less likely that they will be impressed by an offence of prison mutiny that attracts a fairly long sentence. As he rightly says, those people are already in prison for a long time, so the deterrent effect of this measure may not be as great for such people. That is no reason for not introducing this measure so as to catch people on shorter sentences who commit an offence of this nature. I am sure that he will agree that it would be foolish not to pursue the Bill.

Mr. Litherland: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Rumbold: I should like to finish, because I have to deal with amendment No. 8, which would remove clause 1(3).

The first part of clause 1(3) provides that the intentions and common purposes of prisoners may be inferred from their conduct. This is similar to a provision in the Public Order Act 1986 in relation to the offence of riot. That too, as the House will be aware, requires a common purpose, and that common purpose may be inferred from conduct, as we propose here. It is not clear how prisoners' common purpose is to be proved if not by inferring it from their conduct. In the absence of an admission by the prisoners

concerned, there may be no evidence of the formation of a plan to overthrow lawful authority, other than the conduct of the prisoners being consistent with such a plan. For that reason, we should be unhappy to see the first part of clause 1(3) removed.

The second part of clause 1(3) provides that the conduct of different prisoners may take a different form. For example, prisoners may act together in one part of the prison to overthrow an officer, while in another case, others may be in different situations doing different things, but acting in unison. Clause 1(3) as it stands provides that, in both situations, a common purpose may be inferred from the conduct of the prisoners.

I have looked carefully at the amendments tabled by the Opposition—Nos. 4, 5 and 8—but I cannot accept them. I hope that they will accept my reasoning and not press the amendments to a vote. However, it is rare for an amendment to be tabled in the name of both a Secretary of State and his Opposition shadow, as amendment No. 7 is tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). Therefore, I commend that amendment to the House.

Mr. Sheerman: I felt discomfort when I first saw this remarkable juxtaposition of the Home Secretary's name with that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). We believe that this is a major success. We have persuaded the Government of the error of their ways, so they have accepted amendment No. 7. It is interesting to note that the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and others who spoke about the amendments never referred to that fact in all the clone-like speeches that they made on Second Reading. There was no criticism in that debate, but now they accept an amendment that drives a coach and horses through the Bill that we debated on Second Reading.

This has been an instructive process, because, after we asked and persuaded the Government, at the very last minute they are accepting a major amendment that changes the Bill's whole complexion. We shall push to Division amendment No. 5, but we are pleased to have converted the Government to common sense in respect of amendment No. 7, and we will not press the related amendments. I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 4.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 5, in page 1, line 9, leave out from 'prison' to end of line 14 and insert

'together use or threaten violence for the common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority in that prison.'.—*[Mr. Sheerman.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 157, Noes 211.

Division No. 57] **[6 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John

Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrea, Rev William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 1, line 11, leave out from 'prison' to end of line 14.

No. 9, in page 1, line 18, leave out 'paragraph (a) or (b) of,—*[Mrs. Rumbold.]*

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 3, at end insert 'or the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may take the following amendments: No. 2, in clause 2, page 2, line 22, at end insert—

'(4) In section 33 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 (offence of assisting escape by conveying things into prisons) after the word "prisoner", in the second place where it occurs, there shall be inserted the words "sends anything (by post or otherwise) into a prison or to a prisoner" and for the words "seven years" there shall be substituted the words "ten years".

(5) In section 30 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 (offence of rescue or assisting other prisoners) for the words "five years" there shall be substituted the words "ten years".'.

No. 3, in clause 3, page 2, line 28, leave out 'and Wales only' and add ', Wales and Northern Ireland'.

Mr. Trimble: On Second Reading, I asked why a measure that had been described as important and necessary, given the situation that had arisen in prisons in England and Wales, should not be extended to Northern Ireland, where the situation is equally serious. I asked the same question in Committee; on neither occasion was I given an answer.

Since then an answer has arrived, in the form of a letter from the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office. I received the letter yesterday afternoon; I believe that other hon. Members who served on the Committee with me received copies earlier this afternoon. I feel that I should put on record the reasons given by the Minister for not extending the legislation to Northern Ireland. The letter states:

"When the issue was raised with us last June, Peter Brooke and John Belstead gave very careful consideration to the possibility of extension but concluded that, while there were arguments in favour of the introduction of a similar offence (among which was that of the difficulty of sustaining prosecutions for some offences committed during a mutiny or an escape attempt) extension of the Bill to Northern Ireland was neither necessary nor desirable.

We have not, of course, faced a similar situation to that experienced in some English prisons in the early 1990s and Peter Brooke further believed that to introduce such a provision without that background would do nothing to enhance public support for the NI Prison Service and confidence in the strategy for the service which had been launched at that time.

I have noted your reference to the paramilitary campaign for segregation in HM Prison, Belfast and to the explosion which resulted in the deaths of two prisoners. Tragic as this last incident was I have to say that I do not accept that it could be considered as mutiny. But even if it could, those involved would almost certainly be charged with murder and other very serious offences for which the penalties exceed that provided for mutiny in the Prison Security Bill. Similarly, it is our view that Prison rules and the criminal law already provide adequate sanctions for the other offences which have been committed in the Prison."

6.15 pm

The Minister says that the murder of two prisoners in the Crumlin road prison was not mutiny. That may be true of the specific event, but the specific event marked the end of a series of events which undoubtedly involved an intention to overthrow lawful authority within the prison.

I was interested to hear the Minister of State, Home Office mention recent disturbances in Moorland in a previous debate, and cite the scant regard for the public property that those disturbances involved as a reason for the legislation. Let me remind her that the campaign in Crumlin road prison also involved considerable destruction of public property.

That prison may not yet have experienced a riot on the scale of the Strangeways disturbances; but the wrecking of the dining hall a few months ago is just one of many incidents there that demonstrate a clear disregard for public property. I had the doubtful pleasure of touring the Crumlin road prison last Monday, and I saw plenty of evidence of that. I do not think that we have been given sufficient ground for deeming Northern Ireland's circumstances to be different.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office made a significant concession in his letter when he referred to

"the difficulty of sustaining prosecutions for some offences committed during a mutiny or an escape attempt".

That is surely an argument in favour of extending the legislation. We are left with the contrary argument that

"to introduce such a provision . . . would do nothing to enhance public support for the . . . Prison Service."

That is an argument based on expediency.

The present truce in the Crumlin road prison will last until Lord Colville reports, but it will not endure beyond then. After the report, there is likely to be further trouble, perhaps on a substantial scale: there are plenty of scores still to be settled in that prison. During the current lull before the storm, one wonders what impression the Government's present conduct will make. They say that the Bill is necessary to deal with the situation in England; the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland says, "It may be necessary, but I am scared of the effect that it will have on some sections of opinion in Northern Ireland."

What message will such a weak-kneed approach send to terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland? In the present circumstances, it is likely to lead them to believe that they can plan their mutinies with relative impunity.

Amendment No. 2 deals with quite a narrow point. Clause 2 of the Bill plugs a gap in section 39 of the Prison Act 1952, to ensure that items sent to a prison by post——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Or otherwise.

Mr. Trimble: I thank the hon. Gentleman. The aim is to ensure that items sent to a prison by post or otherwise will fall within the definition of assisting a prisoner to escape. That is clearly based on events in Brixton prison.

The point was made in Committee—notably by the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr)—that it was illogical that the Bill should not cover Northern Ireland, especially when one realises that a prisoner in London receiving a parcel from Belfast would be covered by the Bill but that the sender would not. Therefore, it is illogical to extend section 39 of the Prison Act 1952 while not making an equivalent extension to the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) Act 1953.

The Northern Ireland Office said in its letter:

"So far as the point about the posting into a prison of a parcel in relation to clause 2(1)(a) is concerned, the particular problem does not arise because of the wording of the parallel offence in section 33 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953."

I shall deal with that point in detail.

Section 39 of the English Act states:

"Any person who aids any prisoner in escaping or attempting to escape from a prison or who, with intent to facilitate the escape of any prisoner, conveys any thing into a prison or to a prisoner or places any thing anywhere outside a prison with a view to its coming into the possession of the prisoner, shall be guilty".

The existing section refers to "conveying" and "placing". It is evident that the Home Office believed that conveying and placing did not include posting. That is a reasonable view, and it is why the Government are amending section 39 so that it includes posting.

The Northern Ireland Office says that the different wording of section 33 of the Northern Ireland Act obviates the need for a similar amendment, but let us consider section 33 of that Act:

"Any person who, with intent to facilitate the escape of any prisoner, conveys or throws or causes to be conveyed or thrown any thing into any prison or to a prisoner or places or throws or causes to be placed or thrown any thing anywhere inside or outside a prison with a view to its coming into the possession of a prisoner shall be guilty".

The section of the Northern Ireland Act also refers to "conveys" as does section 39 of the English Act, but the only thing that it adds to section 39 is "throwing". Is throwing posting? I suppose that one throws things into letter boxes but throwing cannot be regarded as posting.

Therefore, if section 39 of the English Act does not include posting, which seems reasonable, section 33 of the Northern Ireland Act certainly does not include posting. If section 39 is amended to make express reference to posting as the Government propose, any court considering that is bound to say that Parliament has clearly expressed the opinion that the words "conveying" and "placing" in section 39 do not include posting, and, if "conveying" and "placing" in section 39 do not include posting, then conveying, placing and throwing in section 33 cannot include posting. There is a clear gap, and the obvious way to remedy it is to accept amendment No. 2.

I fear that the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office has been poorly advised about the wording of the legislation. When it is examined, it is clear that the Northern Ireland Office's argument does not hold water. I hope that the amendment will be accepted. If not, I shall divide the House, and I advise Conservative hon. Members that, if they vote against the amendment, they will be voting against the clause in the Bill.

Sir John Farr: I support the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and congratulate him on his initiative and on his perseverance. As he said, he raised this issue—very ably—in Committee, and, like me, on Second Reading.

[Sir John Farr]

For many years, there has been an unfortunate habit, which seems to be dying, of having separate legislation for the mainland, thus separating the needs of Northern Ireland, instead of dealing with them all under United Kingdom legislation. We have increasingly given way to the temptation to have legislation that deals only with Great Britain.

As hon. Members will be aware, this is not the first time that matters of such gravity have been discussed in relation to Northern Ireland. I have heard hon. Members of all parties repeat that there are many reasons why we should move towards legislation covering the whole of the United Kingdom—in other words, Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

One reason is the common-sense reason which, I have found, never appeals to Governments. Apart from that reason, there was a case last summer which involved trainers sent in a parcel from Belfast to a London prison —Wandsworth, I think. Unbelievably, the parcel contained a firearm which was used seriously to injure a prison officer. Even more importantly, it enabled two vicious IRA killers to escape. If only common sense had applied in the past. I am not saying that it would have affected that incident but I should have thought that, faced with that glaring example, some of my hon. Friends, although they may have been reluctant to accept it, would have seen the common-sense solution which is crying out to be adopted in the Bill.

The three amendments which go together are a case of shutting the stable door after the horse has gone. Nevertheless, if we can persuade the Government to accept them as a group, it would make it more difficult for anyone attempting to send a parcel of, for example, trainers from Belfast to the mainland to do so without being caught, because the legislation would be tighter.

As I said, the hon. Member for Upper Bann and I raised the issue on Second Reading and in Committee. I also had access—I dare say that the hon. Gentleman had similar access—to the Home Office. I asked how we could ensure that the common-sense amendments were accepted. The advice that I received through the official channels was that getting sensible amendments accepted in this case—I am talking about United Kingdom legislation, not merely Great Britain or Northern Ireland legislation—had nothing to do with the Home Secretary, but apparently the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland held a different view.

I was advised by the authorities to table questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which I have done unsucessfully. Since the introduction of the Bill, I have not been reached in the ballot on Northern Ireland questions. The written replies that I received are wholly ineffective, because they say that the suggestion is not appropriate.

I reinforce what the hon. Member for Upper Bann said. It is not a case of treating Northern Ireland citizens as second-class citizens or anything so silly, but for years some of us have been saying that the more we can associate mainland legislation with United Kingdom legislation—including Northern Ireland—the more sensible it is likely to be in the first place. That applies to this Bill, which would be more likely to be generally acceptable to the public if the amendment were adopted. I have pleasure in supporting what the hon. Member for Upper Bann has said.

6.30 pm

Mr. Dickens: I do not wish to detain the House for very long, as hon. Members will want to hear the Minister's reply. However, I must congratulate the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) on the way in which he moved this amendment. I suspect that the Minister of State has a duty to see that the Bill goes through unamended, but I have tremendous sympathy for the Northern Ireland Members who have brought this amendment forward.

Those who say that a few people in Northern Ireland will be upset if we increase the sentence from seven years to 10 for the purpose of achieving even-handedness vis-a-vis England and Wales do not have a very good argument. The people of Northern Ireland have had their hearts torn out. They must have cried a million tears. The graveyards are full. I do not want to be too emotional, but I must say that what is proposed would not cause any great alarm. I do not think that the people of Northern Ireland would be too fussy about it. In fact, they would be very pleased indeed if the British Parliament—they are as British as we are—were to demonstrate even-handedness between Northern Ireland and England and Wales. That would be a sensible course of action.

However, the Minister of State replying to this debate is not a Northern Ireland Minister and may therefore be in a difficult position. That I understand, but it would be very nice if she were to go at least as far as to say that the matter will be given further very serious consideration, with a view to achieving even handedness. If such an assurance were given, the Northern Ireland Members might consider not forcing the matter to a Division.

I have sympathy with their argument. I do not see the situation from the point of view of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, as expressed in the letter from which the hon. Gentleman quoted. I congratulate the Northern Ireland Members and my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) on tabling such a sensible and reasonable amendment, which would not upset many people in Northern Ireland and would please most of them.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has reiterated his view that the provisions of this Bill should apply to establishments in Northern Ireland in exactly the same way as they are intended to apply to establishments in England and Wales. I was very interested in the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) and for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens). I am quite sure that those contributions, as well as that of the hon. Member for Upper Bann, will be read carefully by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Indeed, my right hon. Friend has already considered the amendments tabled by the hon. Gentleman, and his view, which I share, is that the provisions of the Bill should not extend to Northern Ireland.

As the hon. Member for Upper Bann has explained, this Bill dealing with the situation in England and Wales was introduced as a direct response to the disturbances that we witnessed in 1990 and to the more recent ones at Moorland and Brinsford at the end of last year. For whatever reason, a number of prisoners in England and

Wales have been determined—and have demonstrated their determination—to cause very great destruction. The Bill is aimed directly at such behaviour.

We heard that the hon. Member for Upper Bann had recently visited Her Majesty's prison, Belfast and had seen disturbances there. He said that he had seen evidence of behaviour similar to that which we have witnessed in prisons in this country. I am informed that the disturbances and incidents that took place in Belfast prison consisted of assaults, either by individual prisoners or by small groups of prisoners, on other prisoners or on staff. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland does not accept that these incidents constitute mutiny or have the common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I have not made a speech, but, in the main, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens). The House will understand my hon. Friend's point. The assumption seems to be that, as these events occurred in Great Britain, there is a need for this law in Great Britain but that, as such events have not yet occurred in Northern Ireland, there is not yet a need for it in Northern Ireland. I am grateful for the courtesy that the Minister of State has shown to the House, but I have to say that it would make sense if the Government were to reconsider this matter before the Bill is debated in another place. The introduction of a provision of this sort should not come after a mutiny.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am well aware of the constitutional point that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) sensibly makes. I am sure he will understand that there has been considerable consultation with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and I am sure that the report of this debate will be drawn to my right hon. Friend's attention.

However, my right hon. Friend advises me that a situation similar to the current situation in this country —which is the reason for our introduction of this legislation—does not exist in Northern Ireland. Hon. Members will say that there have been some serious incidents in Northern Ireland, but, in the view of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, there is no evidence that prisons there are in a state of mutiny, as some of ours undoubtedly have been in the past two years.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Upper Bann that, while such a situation has not arisen, it could arise in the future, however, at present there is no need to introduce in Northern Ireland a criminal offence of mutiny. To do so without a background of disturbances would apparently only damage the community's confidence in the prison system in the Province.

Mutiny is already a disciplinary offence under the Northern Ireland prison rules, and carries a maximum penalty of 180 days' loss of remission, or the equivalent of a 12-month sentence. That is a penalty to which we do not have access in respect of the prisons in England and Wales.

With regard to escape-related offences, there are already many differences between the Northern Ireland legislation and the legislation that applies in England and Wales. Some offences under the Northern Ireland prisons legislation do not appear in the Criminal Justice Act 1982.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): If this is a united Kingdom, the law in Northern Ireland should be the same as that in England and Wales, whatever the consequences. I realise that there are reasons for the approach that my hon. Friend the Minister of State is adopting, but I hope that she will convey the feelings of hon. Members, including many on the Government side, to her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Rumbold: Again, I fully understand the constitutional point that my hon. Friend makes, but, in respect of legislation and administration, there are a number of differences between Northern Ireland on the one hand and England and Wales on the other. These are accepted and respected on all sides of the House. There are many differences in respect of penalties. For example, in England and Wales, offences of escape, rescue and prison breach are dealt with under common law, and there is therefore no maximum penalty. In Northern Ireland, those are statutory offences, carrying fixed maximum penalties of three, seven and seven years respectively. It would not be right in this Bill to make piecemeal amendments to the Northern Ireland legislation.

If amendment No. 2 were accepted, the hon. Member for Upper Bann would have created a far greater and odder discrepancy in sentencing powers that those of which he complains today. There would be a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment for assisting the escape of a prisoner serving a term of less than life imprisonment but a maximum of only seven years for assisting the escape of a prisoner sentenced to life imprisonment. That cannot be sensible.

I note the views of the hon. Member for Upper Bann on amendment No. 2. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is not convinced that such an amendment is needed to make sending a gun into a prison in Northern Ireland by post an offence. Section 33 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953, which is different from legislation on the comparable offence in England and Wales, uses the words:

"Any person who, with intent to facilitate the escape of any prisoner, conveys or throws or causes to be conveyed".

We believe that "causes to be conveyed" are the essential and relevant words which include the matter of posting. We are therefore not convinced that there is a need to bring the penalties for escape-related offences in Northern Ireland in line with the proposed new penalties in England and Wales. We do not consider that amendment No. 2 is necessary. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in this instance. With respect, I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Trimble: I thank Conservative Members who have spoken in support of the amendments, which I very much appreciate. Their support for the amendments is a recognition that the amendments are sensible. I am sorry that the Minister has had to speak from a brief with which the Northern Ireland Office has supplied her. Her suggestion that the circumstances at Her Majesty's prison in Crumlin road do not fall within the concept of prison mutiny is unsustainable. I wish that there was more time available to elaborate on that point. The advice that the Minister has received from the Northern Ireland Office leaves one with the conviction that the Northern Ireland Office is not in Belfast, but in cloud cuckoo land.

[Mr. Trimble]

The Minister will recall that I set out in detail the terms of section 39 of the Prison Act 1952 and of section 33 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953. I clearly demonstrated the close similarity between the two. The Northern Ireland Office claims that section 33 of the Northern Ireland Act is different. I was amused to hear that the phrase that the Northern Ireland Office picks on as different is the phrase "causes to be conveyed". It says that "conveyed" in the Northern Ireland legislation includes posting. If that is so, what does the Northern Ireland Office say about the word "conveys" in the English legislation? In the view of the Home Office, that clearly does not include posting, because it would not otherwise have included clause 2 in the Bill. The argument does not hold water.

I intend to press amendment No. 2 to a Division. However, I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 1.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

OFFENCES RELATING TO ESCAPE

Amendment proposed: No. 2, in page 2, line 22, at end insert—

"(4) In section 33 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 (offence of assisting escape by conveying things into prisons) after the word "prisoner", in the second place where it occurs, there shall be inserted the words "sends anything (by post or otherwise) into a prison or to a prisoner" and for the words "seven years" there shall be substituted the words "ten years".

(5) In section 30 of the Prison Act (Northern Ireland) 1953 (offence of rescue or assisting other prisoners) for the words "five years" there shall be substituted the words "ten years".'.—*[Mr. Trimble.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 5, Noes 211.

Division No. 58] **[6.42 pm**

AYES

Farr, Sir John
Kilfedder, James
McCrea, Rev William
Paisley, Rev Ian
Trimble, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Molyneaux and
Mr. Roy Beggs.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bellotti, David
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'r's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howells, Geraint
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stephen, Nicol
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

Question accordingly negatived.
Order for Third Reading read.

6.53 pm

Mrs. Rumbold: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I want to reiterate the Government's conviction that this particular Bill is an essential piece of legislation, drafted well now, with the amendment that we have accepted, and that it will bring to the prison system a useful deterrent against those people who might think it possible to have some form of disruption leading to the kind of destruction of our prisons that we have seen in recent years.

This is unacceptable. We wish to have the climate in our prisons in which the reforms that we plan to introduce as the result of our White Paper in response to Lord Justice Woolf's wise report will be possible, without the kind of disruption that we have seen in the past.

It is for that reason that I commend the Bill, as amended, to the House.

6.55 pm

Mr. Sheerman: We have argued this Bill on Second Reading, in Committee and now on Third Reading in a positive manner. We have improved the Bill; with the Government's acceptance of a major amendment, we have seen the Bill considerably changed, and we will not be voting against it on Third Reading. We said on Second Reading that, if major amendments were made, we would not vote against the Bill, and we keep that pledge, but I must say, in the brief time allowed me, that the Bill is still disappointing.

Britain's penal system is falling about the Government's ears. When any system is under stress, there are symptoms. Anyone who looks at the prison system, as Lord Justice Harry Woolf did when he considered the Strangeways and other related riots, to which this Bill is a response, will see several symptoms. One is the sort of riot and mayhem that we saw at Strangeways. Another is the tragic suicides increasingly occurring in young offenders' institutions and in prisons—suicides not only of inmates but also of prison officers. Bad industrial relations are also a symptom of a system under stress.

We also see the ghastly symptom of governors and prison officers unable to keep the security of our prisons intact. It is a sad day when we discover that, for seven weeks, the Home Secretary has failed to tell the House that a major criminal, with a record not only of drug trafficking but also of trying to defraud British Aerospace of £40 million, has walked out of one of Her Majesty's prisons. There has been no statement to the House, no reference to it in this place by the Government. It follows on the heels of the apparently simple and easy escape of the two suspected IRA terrorists from Brixton prison.

I mention the symptoms of stress in order to point out that our penal system is in grave disorder. Lord Justice Woolf framed his recommendations to make sure that there was a serious legislative input in the House to reform the prison system. We have consistently argued that this legislation, which we will not oppose in its modified form, dwells on the surface of things and fails to get to the heart of what is wrong with our penal system. It will need an incoming Labour Government to put it right and to put law and order at the top of the agenda.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Uncertificated Securities

6.59 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I beg to move,

That the draft Uncertificated Securities regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 19 December, be approved.

Hon. Members who are interested in the subject will no doubt have seen the draft regulations, which have been available in the Vote Office and will know that at the back of the document is to be found a full summary and explanatory note setting out the basis of the TAURUS system and what the Government propose to do to ensure that that system is properly regulated in the interests of shareholders.

The Government have paid particular attention to the lot of the smaller shareholder. We were extremely concerned that the small shareholder should be able to participate in a debate within his company and that he should be able to vote on whether the company should join the AURUS system or not. We were especially concerned that the small shareholder would not have to maintain his shareholding, if he did not wish to do so, through a commercial controller who might charge him fees for the privilege of maintaining his holding.

We therefore introduced the idea of the——

It being Seven o'clock, and there being private business set down by THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS, *under Standing Order No. 16 (Time for taking private business), further proceeding stood postponed.*

King's Cross Railways Bill *(By Order)*

As amended, further considered.

Clause 7

PASSENGER CONCOURSE BUILDING AT KING'S CROSS AND ST. PANCRAS MAIN LINE STATIONS

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 6, line 25, leave out clause 7.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In last night's edition of the *Evening Standard*, under the headline "Chunnel doubts grow over King's Cross", appeared a quotation from a letter signed by the Minister for Public Transport on 20 January:

"We do not know at this stage whether this station"—

King's Cross—

"will meet the Government's investment criteria. If it does not then, even if the Bill"—

the Bill before us—

"is enacted, British Rail will not be allowed"

to proceed with the project.

I find it surprising that the Minister should send such a letter, given that he has never informed hon. Members of the position. Why was the information circulated in a letter to protesters, rather than raised in the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am finding it difficult to know what is the point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman seems to be addressing his comments to the Minister. I can deal only with points of order.

Mr. Snape: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me come to the point. What is the point of our debating at great length the King's Cross Railways Bill if the Minister in charge of that Bill is writing to outside organisations saying that if the station—the subject of that Bill—is not viable, it will not be built? Why are we wasting our time in those circumstances?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not really a point of order. I can only say that the amendments that have been selected are in order; we should now proceed with them.

Mr. Chris Smith: The amendment would leave out clause 7 of the Bill. In the constructive spirit in which I approached the Bill when we discussed two new clauses in our previous debate, I have tabled the amendment in an attempt to make the Bill a better Bill, and not to frustrate the entire project. I hope, therefore, that it will receive careful consideration.

The amendment would remove the clause that seeks to give outline planning consent for the concourse building between St. Pancras and King's Cross stations. There are a number of reasons for so doing. The first, and probably the most important, is that the House should be wary in principle of legislating, through the private Bill procedure, to facilitate planning permissions. There are plenty of methods available to British Rail and other developers to seek planning consent—especially outline planning consent—for their proposals. The use of the private Bill procedure to obtain planning permission is something of which the House should be sceptical.

The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who is just leaving the Chamber and who for so long chaired the Committee that considered the Bill, will recognise the importance of that point. The Committee commented in its report on the fact that, in certain respects, British Rail was, effectively, seeking planning permission. Commenting on what was then clause 19, the Committee said, in paragraph 48 of its special report:

"We have unanimously decided to delete clause 19 from the Bill."

Clause 19 was the clause that would have overidden listed buildings provisions in respect of the listed buildings on the site in question.

The Committee said that it proposed to delete the clause for two reasons, the first of which is important:

"the exemption from normal planning procedures conferred by the clause would have resulted in the function of planning authority devolving upon Parliament and, in practice, upon this Committee."

It is clear that the Committee was most unhappy about the concept of that function devolving on Parliament through the private Bills procedure. Yet that is precisely what the inclusion of clause 7 entails. As I said, the clause gives outline planning consent for the new concourse building and asks the House, in effect, to act as a planning committee. That stands against the approach of the Committee.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My hon. Friend is illustrating the main problem identified by the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, of which I was a member. It is true that organisations have used—and still use—the private Bill procedure as a way of circumventing normal planning operations and requirements within local authority areas. The House should be careful about allowing itself to be used by organisations to enable them to avoid going through the normal planning consultation process—particularly public inquiries. That is one of the big dangers of the private Bill procedure. British Rail is clearly using and exploiting the House, as I am sure my hon. Friend will agree.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He and other hon. Members did sterling work on the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, which produced a voluminous report, very little of which has been implemented. I shall not refer to it in detail, because I do not wish to detain the House.

Suffice it to say that the trend identified by the Joint Committee and in the Transport and Works Bill, currently before the House is away from the concept of organisations using private Bills to get planning permission. The explanatory and financial memorandum of the Transport and Works Bill states that the Bill

"provides for amendments of legislation dealing with the safety of railway and similar systems, including footpaths crossing them, so as to avoid powers having to be sought by special enactment and implements recommendations of the Fennell inquiry into the King's Cross Underground Station fire".

Quite clearly, the way in which the Government are moving in putting this Bill through the House during this Session, the way the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure was thinking and the views that many hon. Members have expressed in debate and discussion over the past couple of years indicate that the trend of thinking is moving away from the obtaining of planning permission, where normal planning procedures are possible, by the somewhat different means of getting a private Bill through the House, where the proper scrutiny which a planning committee can give to an application cannot, by definition, be given. That is the first reason why this amendment should be considered.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Am I right in assuming that, because this Bill has been before the House for the past three years, the planning procedures now dictate that there is a change of attitude to planning applications, and that if this application had been made within the past six months or so the whole matter would have been considered differently? Is it not correct that to use the analogy that what happened with the former planning procedure would not happen now is somewhat misleading for the House?

Mr. Smith: Not at all, because the situation is that this Bill was lodged in the House in November 1988, when it contained clause 7, which is the subject of the amendment before us. Six months later, British Rail and London Regeneration Consortium, the proposed private developers for the King's Cross railway lands, jointly lodged two planning applications for the railway lands site.

The first of those planning applications was what one might call a master plan for the entirety of the railway lands site—Norman Foster's concept of an egg-shaped park with a great wall of offices round it. The second planning application, however, was specifically for the concourse building which British Rail is proposing between St. Pancras and King's Cross stations.

So British Rail is revealing precisely what it was up to by its actions at that time. It was including in this Bill the seeking of outline planning permission for the concourse building; yet, six months later, it submitted an outline planning application to the normal planning authority for the same concourse building.

If that planning procedure in precisely the normal way is open to British Rail—and it clearly is something that British Rail recognises, because it put a planning application in—it should not be seeking special, separate powers through the private Bill procedure effectively to bypass the planning application which it has already submitted.

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend obviously knows the difference between outline and detailed planning permission. For example, I could seek detailed planning permission at Westminster to turn Buckingham palace into a home for people who are sleeping rough on the streets, to turn it into a hostel for the homeless. I think that would be a very good use to which to put Buckingham palace. I would probably get outline permission, but I doubt very much, knowing the political nature of Westminster corporation, that it would give me detailed planning permission. What British Rail has done is to put the application in to Camden as a blind, and now it is trying to use the House and substitute Camden's detailed planning consent.

7.15 pm

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has a good basic point, because I am sure that British Rail is trying to navigate past the normal planning procedures. However, the effect of clause 7 would be to give outline permission rather than detailed permission. It would still have to go ahead with

[Mr. Smith]

the normal detailed planning permission application. If we allowed clause 7 to speed its way on to the statute book, we would be truncating the outline stage of the procedure.

It is worth asking why British Rail might be doing this, because it is such self-evident sharp practice on its part to seek to get round the normal planning procedures. I can only think that it is because of the existence of the Great Northern hotel. The House will be aware that the Great Northern hotel lies precisely between King's Cross and St. Pancras stations. British Rail proposes the demolition of the Great Northern hotel, which it would replace by a supposedly spanking new concourse between the two.

British Rail had originally hoped that it would get away with doing that through the inclusion of the old clause 19 in the original Bill. The Committee saw British Rail off on that point, I am delighted to say, because it deleted clause 19 from the Bill.

It is worth refreshing our minds on what the Committee said about the Great Northern hotel. It said, in paragraph 53:

"By common consent, the most significant of the listed buildings affected by the King's Cross proposals is the Great Northern hotel, designed by Lewis Cubitt, the architect of King's Cross station, to which it served as an adjunct. The hotel opened in 1854 and has been in use continuously since then. However, it stands on the site of the intended new passenger concourse, and British Rail therefore proposes its demolition."

The Committee went on to say, referring to Norman Foster, the architect of the proposed new passenger concourse building:

"Mr. Foster's designs are striking and may provide the basis for an attractive building. On the other hand, the Great Northern hotel is not only an agreeable mid-Victorian building which, other things being equal, it would be a pity to lose, but it is also an important part of Britain's railway heritage."

That was the verdict of the Committee on the Bill. It very clearly placed substantial value on the existence and appearance of the Great Northern hotel. The Victorian Society has also expressed very great concern about the possibility of the hotel being demolished.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend is probably coming on to the point that I wanted to put to him. This is a hotel of some architectural distinction and some historical connections. I believe that Mr. Gladstone often used the hotel, for reasons that I do not think that I can go into at the moment. In the circumstances, the House would be most unwise to allow British Rail to demolish that wonderful building. Who knows, there might be another Mr. Gladstone sitting in this Chamber who might wish to use that wonderful hotel similarly in the future.

Mr. Smith: I certainly hope that my hon. Friend is not casting aspersions on the predilections of hon. Members of the present-day House. I suspect that he is absolutely right about the frequency with which many eminent Victorians may well have used the services of the Great Northern hotel.

The Victorian Society in a memorandum to myself said:

"The Victorian Society has always considered the survival of the Great Northern Hotel a matter of crucial importance. In 1984, when British Rail was proposing its demolition and replacement with an office block"—

hon. Members should note that British Rail has been trying to get rid of the hotel for some time; all the talk about how wonderful the great new Norman Foster creation will be sits oddly beside the original proposals of only eight years ago for the site—

"we urged the DoE to list it as an historic building, which the DoE agreed to do.

"The Society considers the Great Northern Hotel a building of fine classical design standing at the heart of what is arguably the most important complex of railway buildings in this country. Those seeking its demolition have stated that, as a building, it is not of the same stature as either of the great stations. This is self evidently true but does not diminish the importance of the hotel; it merely reflects the hierarchical manner in which the Victorians viewed architectural style—the hotel was not intended to rival the station, it is a subsidiary building and was designed as such."

The Victorian Society goes on to point out that, despite being a subsidiary building, it is a very fine building. The society's conclusion is:

"The Great Northern Hotel is a building of very considerable architectural and historical significance. Only if there were overriding reasons for its demolition—which the evidence given to the Select Committee of Members of Parliament indicated was not the case—could such action be justified."

That memorandum set the case out clearly. If British Rail insists that it wants to go ahead with the inclusion of clause 7 in the Bill, with the creation of the new passenger concourse and with the overriding of the existing normal planning procedures, the danger is that that will intensify the pressure for the demolition of a very fine listed building in the Great Northern hotel. That, I suspect, is one of the real reasons behind what British Rail is up to in including the clause in the Bill.

Mr. O'Brien: I want to develop the issue of the overriding decision. I support totally the preservation of historic buildings which have played a major part in the life style of the nation. But when we consider all the alternatives, as a Member serving a northern constituency, I feel that the preservation of the Great Northern hotel must be weighed against the benefits and advantages of enabling the northern part of the country to use the channel tunnel. I fear that the retention of the hotel would deny a large part of the country that opportunity. That is what we are defending. I ask my hon. Friend to consider that issue. There should be some way of assessing the advantages of retaining the hotel or the benefits if the hotel site were used for the link between the channel tunnel and the northern counties. The matter must be considered by every hon. Member and by people outside the House.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is right to raise the point. However, he is under a misapprehension. There is no specific need for British Rail to demolish the Great Northern hotel in order to get the links which it requires from a new international station at King's Cross through to the north. The only reason for British Rail to demolish the hotel and to retain clause 7 is to have the fancy new Norman Foster canopy linking King's Cross and St. Pancras. While I sympathise entirely with my hon. Friend's wish to ensure that links are available from King's Cross to the north, clause 7 is not essential for that purpose.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is anxious that the House should not be misled. He quoted extensively from the Committee's comments on clause 19, which is no longer part of the Bill. Will he make it clear to the House that listed building consent for the demolition of the Great Northern hotel, if that were

required, is still needed and would not be overridden by anything in the Bill as it stands? Will he also make it clear that an application has already been submitted to Camden council for outline planning permission for the concourse and that detailed planning permission would also be required? Therefore, the requirements of planning consent are not overridden by anything in the Bill, but would be considered later.

Mr. Smith: In the second part of what he said, the hon. Gentleman has made precisely the case for passing the amendment. He admitted that British Rail has submitted an outline planning application to Camden council. It is still under consideration. There is no need for British Rail to have clause 7 in order effectively to override that planning consent.

I should like also to tackle the hon. Gentleman on hjis first point. I suspect that he was being a little disingenuous about it. Of course, there will still be a requirement to get listed building consent for the demolition of the hotel. The Committee, thank goodness, ensured by the deletion of clause 19 of the original Bill that listed building consent will have to be sought. If the House were to agree to clause 7, that would lead to intense pressure of any future public local inquiry to ensure that listed building consent would be given for the demolition of the hotel for the creation of a new concourse. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that having the listed building procedure as a requirement is ultimate protection, I must ask him to think again.

Once the House has spoken, by including clause 7 in the Bill, it will be very difficult to use any of the other planning procedures in existence to protect the Great Northern hotel. That is the danger. That is why I hope that the amendment will be carried and that clause 7 will be deleted from the Bill. Deletion of the clause would do no damage to possible links from King's Cross to the north, but it would ensure that a fine Victorian building was preserved. It would also enshrine in law the principle that the House does not want to act as a local planning authority. That is up to the normal planning procedures, not to legislation of the House.

7.30 pm

Mr. Waller: I am afraid that I must disappoint the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) because the promoters cannot accept the amendment. It would effectively remove from the Bill the power to construct a concourse building serving the King's Cross and St. Pancras mainline stations.

The House will be aware that the proposed concourse building, together with the link between Pancras road, which is included in works 16 and 17, will provide a single interchange combining the St. Pancras and King's Cross stations, the proposed low-level station and the London underground stations. Hon. Members who use the existing King's Cross concourse regularly will be aware that it is unsatisfactory from both a functional and an aesthetic point of view. In any event, it will have to be replaced by the end of 1996, when the existing planning permission expires.

The facade of King's Cross station has rarely been seen as it was intended by Cubitt. Buildings were erected soon after the station's construction and, more recently, the existing concourse was erected. That would have to be demolished by 1996 if the existing temporary planning permission was not extended. One of the virtues of the proposals before the House is that, for the first time, that superb grade 1 listed station will be seen as originally intended by the architect.

The British Railways Board has applied to the London borough of Camden for outline planning permission to construct the new passenger concourse building at above-street level. But the construction must also be authorised by an Act of Parliament—a fact that the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury may have forgotten. Naturally, the new concourse building will incorporate all the features demanded by long-distance inter-city and international travellers.

Mr. Smith: I am not sure whether I caught exactly what the hon. Gentleman said. If British Rail wishes to carry out railway work, it must seek the authority of the House. If, however, it wants to develop a piece of property—a concourse building linking one station to another without involving railway work is simply the development of a piece of property—it does not require the authority of the House to do so but can proceed through normal planning procedures.

Mr. Waller: I said that the works incorporated at below-ground level in the concourse building are regarded as railway works, and therefore an Act of Parliament is required before they can go ahead. It is correct to say that the new passenger concourse building at above-street level requires outline planning permission, which is why an application has been made to Camden council.

Mr. Smith: In that case, will the hon. Gentleman give us a commitment that British Rail will withdraw the above-street level works provisions from the Bill? On the hon. Gentleman's admission, British Rail does not require parliamentary authority to carry out those works.

Mr. Waller: I am advised that it is necessary for the authorisation to be included in the Act of Parliament, which is why it has been included in it.

Mr. Tony Banks: So that the House understands fully what it is being asked to do, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, whatever may go on underground, and therefore be required to come before the House, the proposal for the demolition of the Great Northern hotel will not be required to come before the House? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, if the Bill goes through, the Great Northern hotel will go?

Mr. Waller: The hon. Gentleman said that in his earlier intervention, but he is incorrect. I am glad to be able to make it clear that the deletion of clause 19 will not override the requirement for listed building consent.

The facilities in the new concourse will be of a different order from those currently enjoyed by long-distance travellers and those using Network SouthEast services. Apart from the functional need for efficient station premises for public transport, it is difficult to have a visually satisfactory new concourse building between the splendid grade 1 listed King's Cross and St. Pancras train sheds and station buildings without demolishing the Great Northern hotel.

It was said a few moments ago and in Committee that, other things being equal, it would be a pity to lose the Great Northern hotel. I agree with that because the hotel is a grade 2 listed building, albeit not of the same quality as its neighbours. However, the Norman Foster building

[Mr. Waller]

that British Rail proposes to build does justice to the grade 1 listed buildings on either side of it. It has all the makings of a building that will do credit to British Rail and its architect, as well as to the two important stations on either side of it.

British Rail, to its credit, recently modified buildings. On Embankment place, just down the river from Charing Cross, is a fine building.

Mr. Banks *indicated assent.*

Mr. Waller: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman concurs with that. In the future, that modern building may be regarded in the same way as we currently regard the existing King's Cross station. Similarly, the new station at Cannon Street has won a civic trust award, and the new buildings at Liverpool Street are also well regarded. I place the proposed new concourse building at King's Cross and St. Pancras in exactly that category.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman is right. The developments that he mentioned are notable, sympathetic and much admired. The point is that the development at Liverpool Street has managed to embody so much of the original structure. How much of the grade 2 listed Great Northern hotel will be embodied within Norman Foster's design? If the hon. Gentleman can show us that that will happen, the opposition to demolition or alteration might be assuaged, but at present it seems to be a question of the total demolition of the hotel. Even the building of Norman Foster, whom I admire greatly—I am always drinking his lager—will not be an adequate replacement for that wonderful grade 2 listed building.

Mr. Waller: If it were possible to retain the existing building, also by Cubitt, that would be a bonus. It is clear from the proposals for the Norman Foster concourse that it is a different kind of building and it would not be compatible with retaining the Great Northern hotel. I believe that other things are not equal. We would lose a grade 2 listed building that is by no means outstanding and would replace it with a modern building of the highest quality.

I wish to confirm that what I said a few minutes ago is correct. Parliamentary powers are needed under clause 7, regardless of whether outline planning has been applied for. Such authority is needed to authorise interference with highways and statutory undertakers' apparatus. Those are both necessary consequences of the construction of a concourse building. Powers are also needed to confer immunity from action causing nuisance arising from the railway operation in and around the building. In other words, the reservations of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who suggested that we were overriding planning permission, either outlined or detailed, and overriding the requirement for listed building consent, have been shown to be without foundation.

Those of us who regularly use King's Cross and St. Pancras want to be able to look forward to the provision of new facilities that are much better than those currently experienced by travellers. However, that will not be possible given the constraints posed by the listed building, which, in any case, requires consent if it is to be demolished. I ask the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I do not wish to detain the House long, but I fear that it will be a long night. I am against the amendment, although I appreciate the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is looking after his constituents.

To those of us from the north of England, there is a choice between the Great Northern hotel and the great north of England. I am afraid that the great north of England must win.

Mr. Chris Smith: If the choice posed were between the needs of the north and the existence of the Great Northern hotel, devoted as I am to the virtues of that hotel, I would entirely agree that the needs of the north of England must come first. But that is not the choice in front of us. The choice is not between protecting the interests of the north of England and saving the Great Northern hotel. The choice is between protecting the interests of the north and not saving the hotel. In that case, there is no contest.

Mr. Martlew: If my hon. Friend had allowed me to continue my argument, perhaps he would have seen its logic.

I represent a constituency in the north-west—other hon. Members who represent that region are present and perhaps they will speak in the same vein. I fear that if clause 7 is deleted, it will be difficult for a link to be made between Euston and King's Cross stations. This week, I had a meeting with senior British Rail officials. They are worried because they have no idea how they will get people from Euston to King's Cross so that people can enjoy the full benefits of the channel tunnel. It appears that they hope that someone will develop a tardis or time machine to get people across to King's Cross. That is worrying. if a solution is not found, support for the Bill from hon. Members representing the north-west will diminish considerably.

Carlisle is near the Scottish border and I fear that travellers will go from Glasgow to Edinburgh and down the east coast to King's Cross because of the problems at Euston. If the amendment is accepted, it will be difficult for British Rail to find a solution. I have sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. If I represented his constituency I might make a similar case, but perhaps without his eloquence. After all, he is a member of the shadow Front-Bench Treasury team and one expects such eloquence from him.

The north of England will suffer if the Bill is not passed. There are great reservations in the north-west. People believe that British Rail will improve the service on the eastern side of the country, once again, and leave us, as it has now, with an inferior service. I say that with great feeling, as I spent an hour and a quarter at Lichfield station on my way down to speak in the debate.

I shall vote for the Bill. I hope that representatives of British Rail and Conservative Members will take note of the great concern felt by those of us from the north-west, who fear that we will not get the full benefits of the Bill.

7.45 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) should know that there is no question in my mind, or that of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), of putting the continued existence of the Great Northern hotel above and beyond the welfare of the north-west and

of his constituency in particular. I know that Carlisle has a good railway station, which serves one of the best BR breakfasts in the country—I have availed myself of it from time to time when travelling through that beautiful constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle has fallen, once again, into the trap that has been skilfully and carefully prepared for those of my hon. Friends who represent the north. That trap is designed to suggest that, if the development at King's Cross does not go ahead, the north will lose out. That is not so. If my hon. Friend's constituents wish to travel from Carlisle to London in order to use the channel tunnel to reach the continent, it will not be of great concern to them whether they travel through King's Cross or through Stratford, unless they want to get out at King's Cross for some reason. If they are just intent on going through the channel tunnel, it does not matter through which London station they go. Given the large number of people from the north who want to go to the continent, perhaps it is more likely that they will use cheaper air services, thus avoiding the long train journey that would be involved in getting from Carlisle to Paris, for example.

Mr. Martlew: Many of my constituents look forward to the day when they can fall asleep in Carlisle and wake up in Paris. That is the way in which people from the north-west will use the channel tunnel

Mr. Banks: Every night I dream of waking up in Paris, but it rarely happens. However, I accept that that is a relevant point. If those people had gone to sleep in Carlisle, they would be even less aware of the London station through which they had passed. They would not be aware if they went via Stratford or King's Cross to Paris. That is my argument.

Mr. Snape *rose——*

Mr. Banks: Heavens, I have flushed out the old ticket collector.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend's wit has flushed out the same old argument, but flushing it out and peering at it does not make it any more attractive. Neither my constituents nor those of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle could get to Paris via Stratford. Whatever the froth, verbiage or wit from my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), he has not told us how to do that whether we are asleep or awake.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are discussing the passenger concourse building. We must not widen the debate.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is continually provoking and goading me. I must tell him that I prefer his speeches when he is asleep rather than when he is awake, but I must let details about our personal relationship outside the House pass by.

We are being asked to agree to the demolition of the Great Northern hotel. The sponsor of the Bill, the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller), was disingenuous—I do not believe that he intended to be so, because he is an honest and honourable man—because once the Bill is passed, the pressure on the Department of the Environment, particularly from the Department of Transport, will be irresistible and listed building consent, for the demolition of the Great Northern hotel will be given. In effect, we are being asked to override the listed building consent, and what the hon. Gentleman said is a technicality, which amounts to nothing. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury has already made that point.

I served as a member of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure and we noticed that the promoters of private Bills continually used private Bills to get around the usual planning procedures. On this occasion, the Select Committee considering the Bill saw that and stipulated that listed building consent was necessary. Unfortunately, that has erected only a very minor obstacle in British Rail's path and it has not safeguarded this grade 2 listed building.

Once we have agreed that the Bill should go ahead, it would be inconceivable that the Department of the Environment would stand in British Rail's way. Even in the event that it did, the matter would go to the Secretary of State, and it is most unlikely, given that the Government and the Minister support the Bill, that the Secretary of State would refuse to give his consent to demolition. We must acknowledge that as a fact of life. All the technicalities in the world will amount to nothing in the face of realpolitik.

The hon. Member for Keighley talked about Norman Foster's design. I am sure that it will be an excellent design, but we all know the sights that we will see in the new concourse, in the guise of the extra facilities that the hon. Gentleman described. There will be Sock Shops, Tie Racks, Casey Jones instant hamburger joints and Knickerboxes where hon. Members can buy frillies on their journeys north. Such places will add nothing distinctive to London—nothing different from what we can see on any other station concourse.

I have said that the development at Liverpool Street is a sympathetic one, but even there the same sort of retail outlets are to be found. There will be no difference in Norman Foster's building.

In effect, the House is being asked to agree to the demolition of yet another listed building in London—the Great Northern hotel. I hope that hon. Members, especially colleagues from the north, can remember the old Euston station building with its concourse and arch. Just to show that this is not a narrow party political point, I recall that that wonderful building was destroyed under a Labour Government. Can anyone claim that the new Euston concourse and station front are superior to the original building? We threw away a great piece of railway history, and I suspect that we will do the same to the Great Northern.

Mr. Martlew: I know the new Euston station well, just as I knew the old one well. My father was an engine driver who took trains into it. For those of us who have to use the new station as passengers, the new station is greatly superior. The old one was a disaster. We should not have to keep buildings just because they are historic and look nice; we have to consider the passengers using them. If we do not, that is a recipe for disaster in the 21st century.

Mr. Banks: That is certainly an argument, but I can think of many counter-arguments. The Palace of Westminster is not particularly convenient for the work of Members of Parliament, nor is it a particularly convenient building for visitors. So let us demolish it. I am sure that we can build a more effective building for our work. I note

[Mr. Banks]

that my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle nods in agreement, but I suspect that he would run into some difficulties, perhaps even with the Department of the Environment, if he tried to demolish the Palace.

Mr. Martlew: I should be delighted if this building were closed down and made into a museum. We could then build a new government building just south of Manchester and remove the Government from London. London has too much influence on how the rest of the country is governed——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are not discussing the merits of the Palace of Westminster or of Euston station.

Mr. Banks: I entirely agree. My hon. Friend led me into giving a comparison, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have often suggested that we should have a moving Parliament that tours other parts of the country. Carlisle would make an excellent stopping place, as would Manchester, Bury—you name it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I long to see those towns for longer periods than I have spent there before.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle suggested that we close down this building, but he did not mention demolishing it. We are discussing the demolition of a building. I agree that the new Euston station is more convenient for passengers, but surely with the architectural skills that we still have in some measure in this country it is possible to combine the best of the old with the best of the new and not just start again from the floor, to to speak. I am sure that it would have been possible to preserve some of the architectural integrity and distinction of the old Euston station while combining it with the modern conveniences that passengers require. That should not be beyond our architects.

It would be easier for London representatives to accept this clause if we knew that there was some way of marrying the excellence of Norman Foster's design with the design of Mr. Cubitt for the Great Northern. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Keighley does not seem prepared to offer us that. If he will give us an assurance that the House will be given another opportunity to consider whether the Great Northern should be demolished, I might be a little more satisfied. If he cannot, I shall support the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury which, whatever hon. Members may think, is certainly not an attempt to destroy the Bill.

It is an honourable course to want to preserve one of the nicer buildings of London. People who come here do so not to see our empty office blocks, to inhale our noxious air full of the exhaust of motor vehicles or to enjoy our weather; they come here to look at our buildings and to stay in some of our quainter hotels. Those hotels are disappearing apace and being replaced by Hiltons and Sheratons—the sort of hotels to be found in any other city around the world. In a chain hotel it is impossible to know whether one is in London, Tokyo or Rome—it cannot be guessed from the interior.

In the Great Northern hotel, however, people know that they are in one of the great Victorian railway hotels where they can see the bed where Mr. Gladstone laid his grey and venerable head. Anyone prepared to walk with heavy boots over the memory of Mr. Gladstone is risking the anger not only of Londoners but of parliamentarians of many former generations. People should think carefully before they do that, because Mr. Gladstone might return to haunt them while they are walking around the Sock Shops and Knickerboxes of the new concourse that will link these two stations.

Mr. O'Brien: If people are still sleeping in the bed that Mr. Gladstone occupied in the Great Northern hotel, that is reason enough for its demolition. It should be modernised along the lines that British Rail is contemplating. If that is the best that the Great Northern can offer, it is time we looked at what provision we are making for tourists. If that is the best on offer, we are failing to encourage tourism in the area.

However, if we have a new development and connections between the north-east and the north-west on that campus, there will be many benefits for many people who, I assume and hope, would favour the channel tunnel development. Are we saying that because a grade II listed building must remain, my constituents and the people of Carlisle and other places in the north will be denied the facilities that are associated with the channel tunnel? We cannot pay the price of maintaining the Great Northern hotel, a grade II listed building, if that means that my constituents and others in the north will be sacrificed and unable to benefit from the channel tunnel.

Clause 7 refers to the development of a passenger service concourse. That is just part of the development of the facilities for the use of channel tunnel passengers. I hope that, after this episode, British Rail will introduce a programme whereby we in the north-east, the north-west and the Border areas will be told how the freight trains will transport goods from the north of England, through London and to the channel tunnel. That is not mentioned in the Bill. I hope that after tonight's debate, we shall hear some explanation to allay my concerns and those of my colleagues about what will happen in regard not only to passenger services, but freight services also.

8 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend has touched on an exceptionally important point. The issue of freight and of how we can ensure that freight can reach the channel tunnel from all parts of the country is extremely important, but hitherto the Government have said not a word about it. There is no proposal that freight should go through King's Cross. At the moment and as far as we can understand, it is intended that freight will go round London. We have not heard any clear statement from the Government on that issue, and it is high time that we did.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are discussing clause 7.

Mr. O'Brien: I am referring to clause 7(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker, which states:

> "In this section 'the designated land' means the land in the London borough of Camden".

I hope that references to the designation of land for development do not apply only to the provision of passenger services because we must consider other facilities, such as the provision of freight services.

I rest my case on the fact that I believe that substantial advantages can flow from the development of facilities in the King's Cross-Euston-St. Pancras area and that people from the north can benefit tremendously from them. I have supported my hon. Friend the Member for Islington,

South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) in the past on the issue of environmental assessments because I believe that his constituents must be protected against developments that might interfere with their quality of life. However, when it comes to the question of whether to retain a grade II listed building, and to weighing the consequences of its retention with the loss of advantage for millions of people in the north of England, I must appeal for the decision to be taken in favour of the people whom I represent in the north of England. I hope that my hon. Friend will see the value of those points.

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) has made what appears on the surface to be a persuasive case, but the institution of the passenger concourse that British Rail is now proposing between St. Pancras and King's Cross on the land referred to in clause 7 is not in any way an essential requirement to ensure that people in the north-east and north-west can benefit from the location of the international station at King's Cross. It is an adjunct to that basic requirement. The removal of clause 7 would not in any way damage the interests of the people who wish to travel from the north.

Mr. Waller: I am sorry to have to press the hon. Gentleman on this point, but does he agree that if, for the reasons that I mentioned earlier, it were impossible to develop any new concourse, all travellers—both long-distance travellers and commuters—would be seriously disadvantaged if the existing facilities had to be relied on? Would there not be great difficulty in overcoming the requirement for the existing concourse in front of King's Cross to be demolished if its temporary designation were not renewed, even assuming that there was not a big question mark over the length of time for which it can be renewed?

Mr. Smith: In so far as the hon. Gentleman is referring to the inadequacies of the present concourse, he is entirely right, because it is not sufficient to cope with the existing passenger load at King's Cross. If 15 million extra passengers a year are to travel through King's Cross, the problem will be considerably worse. However, that is not the choice before us. I do not have the slightest doubt that it is possible to preserve the Great Northern hotel and to create a new concourse between King's Cross and St. Pancras and to do both without damaging the interests of travellers from the north. I am sure that, if British Rail applied its mind to that task, it would find it perfectly possible to come up with a solution.

I should like to answer a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) about the links from the new passenger concourse—not to the north-east, but to the north-west. As my hon. Friend said, that is of fundamental importance to many of our colleagues who represent constituencies in the north-west. The ability to get from the new passenger concourse, to which the amendment refers, to Euston station, which is the obvious and main link to the north-west, is an essential part of British Rail's case for the entire Bill. However, British Rail has not been particularly candid about the link to Euston.

On 25 November 1990, when we debated the carryover motion, the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) said:

"All that I can say on the fixed link between Euston and the new complex"—

which is what we are considering in clause 7—

"—because I mentioned that a number of options are still being considered—is that it will be a dedicated link. Some of the roads in the vicinity which are owned by British Rail, for example, may be used and a bus may travel on a dedicated route or on a dedicated track. At this stage, I cannot say what the link will be, although I can say that it will be a dedicated, high-quality link."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 686.]

We are entitled to ask both of the Government and British Rail what precisely this dedicated high-quality link will be. The House will recall that the original British Rail proposal was for a travelator linking King's Cross and Euston. Let us leave aside the fact that a travelator would have to be at least 1 km in length and require a journey, moving at the sort of speed at which travelators at Heathrow airport move, of 20 minutes. British Rail then discovered that there was a slight problem about linking the new passenger concourse at King's Cross with Euston by a travelator. It would have to run directly through the six-storey basement of the British Library, which has just been built at enormous public expense and which lies slap-bang between the new concourse and the link to Euston and the north-west.

Having discovered that a travelator would not be the easy answer that it supposed it to be, British Rail appears to be saying that such a plan is not on—there has been some discussion between British Rail and local authorities in the north-west—and it is looking at other options. Among the options is a subway with a partial travelator. This would involve a travelator for part of the way and then passengers would have to walk, carrying their suitcases, for the rest of the way. Another option is a subway on its own, with no travelator. That would involve a walk of 1 km to get from the channel tunnel train at King's Cross to a train to the north-west at Euston. For many people, a walk of that distance would be a discouragement to making the journey.

Another option is a light rail transit link between stations. If it were to be effective, that would impose a substantial extra cost on the operation. Another option is a bus route from one station to the other, perhaps through all the local residential streets that have recently been subjected to traffic calming measures and the exclusion of substantial vehicular traffic.

I say to my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in the north-west that the assumption on which everyone entered discussions about the Bill—that it would be easy and simple to get from the channel tunnel trains at King's Cross to the trains to the north-west from Euston—will not hold. Unless and until British Rail comes clean on how the Euston link will be managed and created, there will be continuing doubt about that link. I say that because this is an important point, relating to the issue of the new passenger concourse dealt with in the amendment and because my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle was right to raise a question mark over how sincere British Rail is in assuring us that links to the north-west will be readily available.

The debate on this amendment has ranged reasonably widely. At the outset, I raised two points that the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) then failed to address. The first involves a point of principle. That is, that it is wrong for the House, by means of private Bills, to take planning decisions. The second point is that British Rail has submitted a planning application to the London borough of Camden for the outline permission that is set out in clause 7. By that action, it has admitted that it has no need to seek the powers in clause 7.

8.15 pm

The hon. Member for Keighley made one valid point—that there might be, he was advised, some work below ground that required, as an essential ingredient, parliamentary authority. If that is the case, British Rail should be seeking authority for those below-ground works and not including as part of them the above-ground works for which it does not require parliamentary authority. Clause 7 specifically says:

"The Board may in, on, over or under any part of the designated land make, maintain and operate the passenger concourse".

Therefore, even if British Rail does require parliamentary authority to carry out works under the designated land, it does not need to come to the House for authority to do so in, on or over. That is the argument that lies behind the amendment, and I commend it to the House.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 10

STOPPING UP ROADS

Mr. Chris Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 7, leave out lines 10 and 11.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 3, in clause 20, page 11, line 27, at end insert—

'(5) Nothing in this Act shall authorise the Board or the Company to purchase or use the land in the London Borough of Camden numbered 88-101 on the deposited plans.'.

No. 4, in clause 23, page 13, line 31, at end insert—

'(3A) On completion of Works Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4A and 4B, the Board shall, within six months, reinstate on the land numbered on the deposited plans 25 in the London Borough of Camden, the natural park known as Camley Street Natural Park, with all necessary facilities and conveniences.'.

No. 5, in clause 23, page 13, line 38, at end insert—

'(5) Within six months of completion of Work No. 2, the Board shall reinstate on the site of 13-17 Caledonian Road in the London Borough of Islington, land numbered 76 in the deposited plans, a hostel of at least 33 bedspaces for homeless people.'.

No. 11, in schedule 4, page 26, line 8, column 3, leave out

'for the general purposes of the Board'

and insert

'to be returned to the freeholder'.

No. 12, in schedule 4, page 26, line 10, at end insert—

'39-70 For the provision of a construction site and thereafter to be returned to the freeholder.'.

Mr. Smith: This group of amendments deals with a number of detailed aspects of the works that British Rail is proposing and especially with what should happen to land or property once British Rail's need to use them in carrying out the works has expired.

Amendments Nos. 2, 11 and 12 are very much of a piece. The key point concerns use of land. If British Rail requires land not for its railway purposes, such as putting a track or station on it, but simply to assist with building work—for example, to gain access to the great box that it intends to create below level, as a place to put site huts on, or to keep some of the ancillary equipment that it needs to carry out the basic railway works—once the work is finished and the station is complete, those bits of land should be returned to their original owners. The Bill does not say that. In such cases, British Rail can retain land when the work is finished even when there is no railway-specific need to retain it, and presumably undertake property development and make a profit on it.

The amendments argue that, instead of British Rail acting as a property developer and profiting from land when its need to use it has ended, that land should be returned to its former owners for whatever better potential use they may decide.

Mr. Derek Stuckey wrote to me in considerable detail about the land that is in his ownership. I can best set the scene by explaining that Mr. Stuckey is a 75-year-old barrister who retains chambers at No. 3 Dr. Johnson's buildings in the Temple. Mr. Stuckey lives at No. 2 to 2a Keystone crescent, which property is directly subject to the Bill.

Mr. Stuckey was born at No. 2 Keystone crescent, and his family have owned land at King's Cross—including that now sought to be acquired—for more than 100 years. His son Robert and his family live at No. 9 Keystone crescent, and his other son, George, lives at No. 1 Omega place. Therefore, the family have deep roots in the area affected by the Bill.

Mr. Stuckey writes that the total area of land that he owns, and which is in the purview of the amendments, is about half an acre, and includes within the limits of deviation of the Bill nine shops in Caledonian road—Nos. 10 to 26, even, inclusive. They include a health food shop, cafe, toiletries, florists, newsagent and confectioner, men's and women's outfitters, greengrocer, barber shop, and an Italian delicatessen. The upper parts of those shops are used mainly for residential purposes.

Mr. Stuckey writes:

"The construction of the low-level station would result in the demolition of the parade of shops, and of the garage at the rear. Yet, according to the plans submitted to the Select Committee of the House of Commons, on the most unfavourable view, only a small part of this land would be occupied by the proposed low-level station. By far the greater part of the land would be used solely as a site for the purposes of the construction of the low-level station.

At the end of the day, it is proposed that British Railways Board shall retain, not simply the proposed low-level station but the remainder of the land taken as a construction site."

In other words, after British Rail had used the land as a construction site, and, although it would not thereafter need it for any specific railway or station purposes, British Rail would continue to own it.

Amendments Nos. 11 and 12 seek to ensure that those parts of the site currently owned by Mr. Stuckey and not required for the railway or the station are returned to him, so that he may decide on proposals for its subsequent use. If British Rail Property Board makes that decision, I suspect that we will see not a return to the small, human-scale shopping facilities that currently exist, but a British Rail office block.

"It is suggested that British Railways Board should not be permitted by private Bill to acquire land for development, but only for the operational purposes of their railway, and that the persons from whom it is compulsorily acquired should have the opportunity of redeveloping it, once the primary purpose of acquiring the land—the construction of the low-level station—has been accomplished . . . None the less, the return to me of the remaining one third of the site"—

the other two thirds are not owned by Mr. Stuckey—

"would enable me or my successors to influence the development of the former coach station, in the interests of the residents of Keystone Crescent, and to endeavour to secure the rebuilding of the parade of shops, in substantially the same form, though with such modifications and improvements as might be necessary and practicable."

Mr. Stuckey says that, if the land is not required by British Rail after the development has been completed were returned to him, he would be sensitive to the traditions of the area—in terms of the kind of shops that currently exist and the need to replace them. You can bet your boots, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if British Rail Property Board retains ownership of the land, it will not have the same interests of the local people and community at heart.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend see a link between the case that he describes and that of Crichel Down, in which—in almost exactly parallel circumstances—land was not returned for agricultural purposes until a court decided that that was just what the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was required to do? It might be better to accept my hon. Friend's amendment to ensure that Mr. Stuckey, who is a barrister, does not delay matters by indulging in litigation—particularly as there may be a major precedent to help him.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend draws an extremely important analogy. The Bill provides for British Rail to retain the ownership of the sites when the development is completed for the general purposes of the board. They cover a multifarious array of activities, including office development, to maximise British Rail's profit. That is not necessarily a fair way of dealing with someone such as Mr. Stuckey, whose family has had land in the area for a substantial length of time.

Amendment No. 2 will delete from clause 10 the proposed road closure of Omega place. Even if that closure is temporarily required for works to be undertaken, it is wrong to write into the Bill the permanent closure of Omega place, when that is not a requirement for the completed station's operation. Mr. Stuckey writes:

"future development is likely to lead to the construction of a single, large building or block of buildings, which will materially alter the character of the district, to the prejudice of the residents and of the neighbourhood."

By seeking the permanent closure of Omega place, British Rail aims to ensure that subsequent development can spread on either side, while including Omega place itself, and a bigger office block can be built subsequently. That would substantially alter the character of the neighbourhood.

Mr. Stuckey continues:

"The time for considering the closure of Omega Place is when plans for future redevelopment of the site are put forward. If those plans are of sufficient merit to warrant it, the closure of Omega Place can then be considered, and effected by the usual procedure, which provides for objections by owners of land adjoining the highway. Until such plans are put forward, and shown to be an improvement on what exists at present, the bias should be towards a redevelopment of the land substantially in its present, useful form."

That puts the case very succinctly. So far, British Rail has told us nothing about what it will put in place of the land that it is grabbing by means of the Bill, and the additional land that will result from the closure of Omega place. I fear, however, that we shall see a substantial commercial office development.

8.30 pm

If that is so, by enabling Omega place to be closed and ensuring that British Rail can hang on to bits of land that it will not need after the completion of the station, we are allowing British Rail carte blanche to present whatever proposals it wishes to present. We ought to be saying, "Let us look specifically at what British Rail proposes—or what the present owners propose—at the time when the proposals are presented."

British Rail does not need the powers that it seeks in the Bill to build its station. We should ensure that such matters as the closure of Omega place are decided on their merits, at the appropriate time, rather than being dealt with now, on a permanent basis, when British Rail requires only a temporary closure to carry out its work.

Amendment No. 11 relates to other working sites, which are not owned by Mr. Stuckey to the same extent. Schedule 4 concerns a large area of land in both Camden and Islington, towards the north of the site. Here again we confront the problem referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). The schedule would enable that piece of land to be used for the provision of a construction site, and

"thereafter for the general purposes of the Board."

Most of the land should be returned to its former owners, under the Great Northern Railways Act of 1846, if it ceases to be used for railway purposes.

The Camden land is currently the subject of litigation by its former owners, the St. Bartholomew's hospital trustees. I shall not say too much about that, because the matter is sub judice; suffice it to say that the trustees are arguing powerfully that the land which, under the 1846 Act, ought to be returned to them, should not end up in the hands of British Rail if British Rail has no specific railway purpose in mind for it. They feel that that principle ought to apply when land is needed for construction purposes, but is not required when the construction is over.

According to the book of reference attached to the 1846 Act, the equivalent land in Islington used to be owned by a gentleman called Mr. Leigh Keck. Mr. Keck's descendants, or assignees, may be interested in getting their land back, just as the St. Bartholomew's trustees are interested in getting theirs back. Amendment No. 11 would resolve all those problems by ensuring that working sites that are required for works but not for the station that will subsequently be built should be returned to their freeholders, or to the descendants of the original owners.

Amendment No. 4 seeks to ensure that the Camley street natural park is reinstated within six months of the completion of the works that will destroy it. The park was created, as a superb natural ecological environment, by the Greater London Council, and has been much appreciated by many hundreds of local school children. It has been used as an educational resource by both Camden and Islington education authorities. The park, which is located beside the canal, will be destroyed if the Bill is enacted. British Rail intends to build a series of railway tracks there.

I should be fair to British Rail: it has consistently said that the park will subsequently be reinstated. That will be difficult; it is impossible to develop a fragile ecological environment overnight. British Rail, however, claims that it may even make the park a little bigger.

My amendment effectively says to British Rail, "Once you no longer need the area for the works, the Camley street park must be reinstated immediately". I do not want British Rail to drag its feet, feeling—when the station is completed and the railway lines are in place, and it is time to turn to the property development that London Regeneration may then be beginning to undertake—that office blocks come first and Camley street comes last.

I want Camley street to come first; I want to ensure that that precious educational and environmental resource is restored at the first opportunity for the benefit of local children. I hope that, even if the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) will not accept amendment No. 4, he will give a firm commitment that British Rail will embark immediately on the job of reinstating Camley street once the land is no longer required for works.

Amendment No. 5 concerns a hostel for the homeless, now located at 13-17 Caledonian road. The hostel was opened in May last year by the Minister for Housing and Planning, with a considerable fanfare of trumpets. The local newspaper was very positive about the affair. It interviewed a young woman called Tracy Atkinson, who was being housed in the hostel. The report stated:

"Housing minister George Young, opening the 33-bed hostel in Caledonian Road on Thursday last week, was shown Tracy's room and heard first hand how she"—

oh, I beg the House's pardon—Tracy Atkinson is a man, not a woman—

"how he had ended up there."

The point is that that hostel for the homeless was created with assistance from the Church housing association and was sponsored by the Government and opened by the Minister only seven or eight months ago, yet it is one of the properties affected by the Bill.

As soon as British Rail gets permission to start compulsorily purchasing and demolishing property, the hostel will be one of the properties to go. At most, the hostel will have had a life of two years or perhaps three years if it is lucky. Surely provision for homeless people should not be made on the basis that a facility will be up and running for only two or three years. My amendment does not seek to stop it being knocked down, because that would fundamentally breach the Bill, but it seeks to ensure that once the work is finished a hostel for the homeless will be recreated by British Rail.

British Rail will have the necessary land because it will have the land on top of the station box which it will try to redevelop. It will also have all the railway land behind King's Cross and St. Pancras stations which London Regeneration is likely to develop and all the land that it is taking for construction purposes but which it will not need for the station. Therefore, British Rail will have the land and the amendment would ensure that a hostel for the homeless would be recreated in any subsequent development undertaken by British Rail.

Amendment No. 3 seeks to delete from the land used by the promoters what is known as the lighthouse block. Hon. Members who frequently go through King's Cross will know that the lighthouse block is the building at the apex of the triangle as one faces along the Euston road towards Pentonville road with King's Cross on the left. The building immediately in front of one at the apex of the triangle has a structure on top of it which is reminiscent of a lighthouse, and it has always been known as the lighthouse block.

The triangular block of which the lighthouse is the apex is bounded by Grays Inn road, Pentonville road and King's Cross bridge just to the east of King's Cross station. Although it is included in the Bill, British Rail announced on the first day of the Committee hearings—on 22 June 1989—that it was not needed for any of the work included in the Bill. British Rail is saying—and has been saying for the past two years—that it does not need to take the lighthouse block. In that case, the promoters should be able to accept my amendment immediately, because it seeks only to delete that block from the Bill.

This detailed series of amendments relates to specific pieces of land which British Rail may in some instances require temporarily but not subsequently. In the case of the lighthouse block, it is land that it does not require at all. Camley street and the hostel for the homeless are important social facilities on existing property and pieces of land in the area which I seek to have reinstated or recreated by British Rail as rapidly as possible after it has completed its works. Those are reasonable points, and I hope that they will receive a reasonable response from the Bill's sponsor.

8.45 pm

Mr. Waller: I shall deal with the amendments in the order chosen by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). The promoters are not able to accept amendment No. 12. Its effect would be to prevent the British Railways Board from permanently acquiring the major portion of an area of land which is known locally as the coach station block, and it would limit the board's powers to acquire the block temporarily as a construction site.

The coach station is not required by the British Railways Board merely as a construction site. The proposed low-level station and its approach tracks from the south-east will be located on or under the block and, therefore, the board requires permanently to acquire and retain the freehold of the block to enable the construction and maintenance of the works so that the block will become operational land over which the board will retain permanent access and control.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) drew what I considered a spurious comparison with the Crichel Down case, but, as he will know, in that case the land was not used for the purposes for which it was acquired, and the scandal arose because, in the meantime, its price had inflated considerably and the original owner did not benefit. In this case, of course, the land will definitely be used and is required not for property development but for the railway works themselves.

If the amendment were accepted, it would create significant difficulties, because it includes all the properties in the coach station block except four in the row of shops facing Caledonian road, which are omitted for some unaccountable reason known only to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury. Perhaps he will explain why the owners of those properties should not also enjoy the benefit of his proposed amendment. There seems to be a defect in the drafting of the amendment, which I think, would ensure a result entirely contrary to that which he intends.

Mr. Cryer: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that my analogy with the Crichel Down case is mistaken because, in this instance, British Rail has no intention of undertaking any development after the purchase of the land, the use of it as a construction site and its restoration as there will be a need for some of the land—in whole or in part—to be in operational use underneath to allow for the approach of other tracks? If so, is he also saying that, if British Rail gets hold of land which is superfluous to requirements for construction purposes, it would be

parallel to the Crichel Down case if British Rail then obtained the enhanced value of the land and retained it for entirely different purposes?

Mr. Waller: No, I am saying that British Rail would not be seeking to acquire the land for its temporary or permanent purposes if it were not for the railway development work that it intends to carry out. There is no comparison with the Crichel Down case, which involved different issues and in which the land was not used at all, but in which the original owner did not benefit.

I must disappoint the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury by saying that amendment No. 2 cannot be accepted. It would take from the Bill the power permanently to stop up Omega place between points X8 and X9 as shown on the deposited plans. It is considered that Omega place is too narrow and is located too near Pentonville road to be capable of being used as a means of access to the coach station block following the construction of the works, and that it must therefore be stopped up permanently. Indeed, the Department of Transport King's Cross highways improvement scheme has been prepared on the basis that Omega place will remain stopped up and that access to the coach station block will instead be via Northdown street.

Amendment No. 11, too, is unacceptable. It relates to properties in Camden forming part of the railway lands at King's Cross that are owned by the British Railways Board and are occupied partly by the board and partly by the operators of concrete mixing plant and other industrial users. Schedule 4 to the Bill will enable these properties to be used for the provision of a construction site and, therefore, for the general purposes of the board. This amendment would revise that provision so that it would read:

"For the provision of a construction site and thereafter to be returned to the freeholder."

But the amendment is misconceived, since all these properties are already in the ownership of the board. This is another point that the hon. Gentleman seems to have neglected to check before tabling his amendment.

Amendment No. 4 would require the British Railways Board to reinstate the Camley street natural park in its present position after completion of the relevant works. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the board accepts the importance of preserving this facility, and detailed discussions between the board, the London Wildlife Trust and the London borough of Camden have been taking place over a long period. It is expected that a satisfactory agreement will be reached between the board, the trust and the borough with respect to the natural park. This will cover a number of matters, including the park's resiting during and after completion of the works.

As was said during a previous debate, it is intended that, during the construction work, there will be a small natural park. This will ensure an element of continuity, which would otherwise be lost. The amendment is inappropriate in that, its limitations would impose too simplistic a solution on a complex problem—a solution that would not entirely meet the wishes of any of the parties most closely concerned with these sensitive issues.

Mr. Chris Smith: I should like to put two questions to the hon. Gentleman. First, he says that there are proposals for the re-creation of Camley street to a limited extent during the course of the works. Is that the project in respect of which British Rail very recently submitted an application for planning permission to knock down a building in Goods way, in the Regent's canal conservation area, to make way for a car park and study centre? If that is indeed the case, it is a very small site, which in no way represents a replacement, even on a temporary basis, for Camley street.

Secondly, in the discussions with Camden and the London Wildlife Trust, has any account been taken of the time scale for the re-creation of Camley street on a permanent basis after the work has been done? It is time scale that my amendment seeks most actively to promote.

Mr. Waller: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is yes. The temporary park is indeed related to the application to which he has referred. I do not think I used the word "replacement". It is not intended that that temporary facility should be an adequate replacement. That is why the promoters propose replacing the existing natural park with a rather larger one in a slightly altered position.

The existing park came into existence very quickly. The hon. Gentleman has referred to the fragile ecological environment. Anyone who has examined the site of the Camley street natural park will be aware that the environment in which it developed was not propitious so far as the intentions of the people who devised it were concerned. In many ways, it is a tribute to their imagination that it came into existence, and the board is certainly determined that there should be developed something that is just as much an asset to the area and to the schoolchildren who visit it.

It is not possible at this stage to give an exact time scale, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that the board is determined that the facility that comes into existence following completion of the works will be at least as good as that which currently exists. In fact, because it is larger, it will be ecologically suitable for a wider variety of species. I do not believe that the people of the locality will be disappointed with the park that they are ultimately able to enjoy. The hon. Gentleman's narrow amendment does not really accord with the wishes of those parties most closely concerned with these issues, and I do not believe that they would necessarily support the amendment in its present form.

I am afraid that I am unable, on behalf of the promoters, to accept amendment No. 5, which relates to a building known as 13-17 Caledonian road, Islington, which is owned by a finance company, Gleniffer Finance Corporation Ltd. When the Bill was deposited, that building was vacant, and it will be demolished for the purposes of the works. Pending demolition, the owners made arrangements to enable the building to be used as temporary residential accommodation for homeless persons, but that temporary use will cease on demolition.

I submit that it would be unreasonable to require the board to provide on that site a permanent hostel for homeless persons. In any event, there must be doubt as to whether this is a suitable place for such a hostel. The suggestion that it is suitable is not reflected in the land uses contained in the planning brief recently approved by the Islington council.

Mr. Cryer: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government are seriously in error in having as their flagship the conquest of homelessness in London and the removal of some of the cardboard cities? Have we simply

[Mr. Cryer]

had a plaster to cover the terrible policies that resulted in the creation of cardboard cities in London and other major urban areas? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government are mistaken in undertaking the work at this site?

Mr. Waller: The task of providing accommodation for homeless people in London is a vital one. What I am saying is that it is not a task for the British Railways Board. Arrangements were made to ensure that this building would not stand empty during the period of construction. However, that concession—if I may call it a concession—was not intended to suggest that there should be a permanent requirement on the board to provide a hostel for homeless people. That is a desirable objective, but one to be addressed by other agencies.

I am happy to say that amendment No. 3 is acceptable. It would disapply the powers of compulsory purchase which would otherwise apply to the properties referred to in the Select Committee proceedings as the island triangular block—the so-called lighthouse block. As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury knows, since the Bill was deposited, the design for the works has been further refined, and the promoters are now satisfied that they will not need to purchase compulsorily any property in the island triangular block. The promoters are therefore prepared to accept amendment No. 3.

9 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: Before turning to the welcome news about amendment No. 3, I shall comment briefly on the other amendments. The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) castigated me in relation to amendment No. 11 for seeming to be unaware that some of the land to which the amendment referred and which it required to be returned to the freeholder was at present in British Rail ownership. I was, of course, aware of that.

The point that I sought to make through the amendment was that the provisions of the Great Northern Railways Act of 1846 have still not been fully resolved in relation to those portions of land. We shall shortly discuss the specific provisions of the 1846 Act and the rights of reversion. It is possible that, if the land ceases to be required for railway purposes, under the provisions of the 1846 Act, it immediately has to leave the hands of British Rail and be returned to the original owners. I was conscious of that point, and that is why the amendment is drafted in its present form.

I am disappointed to hear that it is not possible to give a time scale for the replacement of Camley street natural park. We all hope that, when it is replaced, Camley street will be bigger and better, and even more of an educational resource for local children and local people than the existing natural park is. There is a lot of local concern about how rapidly, or slowly, that will happen.

The purpose of amendment No. 4 was to spur British Rail on to say that Camley street must be replaced as quickly as possible, rather than have the matter dragged out until the very end of any development on the railway land. That is a danger, because Camley street will not be profitable for BR. It is an obligation that BR will have to undertake for the benefit of the community. I hope that British Rail will not say that, because the natural park is a community benefit and because the board will not reap a profit from it, it will wait for years before it recreates the park. I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Keighley did not give a commitment about the time scale.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Many of us from Scotland are keen that the Bill should make progress because of the benefits that it will bring to Scotland. However, as a supporter I say that I, too, am disappointed that there has not been a better commitment about Camley street natural park. I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) well in his campaign because, although we support the Bill, I assure him that we also support Camley street natural park.

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he just said. His comment shows that, even among colleagues who strongly support the location of the new international station at King's Cross, there is concern about the impact on local people and on the local environment, and on the extremely valuable resource of Camley street natural park which was created by the Greater London council.

On amendment No. 5, the hon. Member for Keighley said that it was not in the purview of BR to create permanent accommodation for homeless persons. If, as I suspect, the hon. Gentleman was suggesting that he believes that BR's purpose is fundamentally to run a railway, and to provide stations, trains and transport, I agree. It is not in the purview of BR to seek to make profit out of property speculation and property development.

If the hon. Member for Keighley is taking the attitude that he has taken on the question of any re-creation of a hostel for the homeless, I urge him to take precisely the same attitude on the future of the land referred to in amendments Nos. 2, 11 and 12, because the land and the property mentioned there are not required by British Rail for running a railway either. If British Rail is not in the business of providing hostels for the homeless, it should not be in the business of speculating on land which it will, in effect, have expropriated from the land's existing owners.

The basis of amendments Nos. 2, 11 and 12 is that, if British Rail does not require a particular piece of land once the station is completed—it has to have that land for access, construction or some other purpose while the work goes on but the purpose ceases once the station is completed—it should not be able to make a killing out of having compulsorily purchased that land in the first instance and then subsequently seeking to develop it. That is an important point of principle.

The House should protect the interests of existing owners rather than handing over land that British Rail does not need permanently. If BR needs the land temporarily, we should give it temporarily to BR in the Bill, but we should not allow BR to take permanently something that it does not need permanently.

Having said that, however, and having explained why I think that the hon. Member for Keighley and British Rail are wrong to seek the powers that my amendments would delete, there is good news on amendment No. 3. As the hon. Member for Keighley said, BR has said that it does not now require the lighthouse block. In that case, I hope that we can now proceed to vote on amendment No. 3 to ensure that that provision is indeed deleted from the Bill.

You may be able to guide me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on how this can be done under our procedures. Instead of voting on amendment No. 2, which I moved, I wish to ensure that we can put amendment No. 3 to a vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the hon. Member seek the leave of the House to withdraw his amendment No. 2?

Mr. Smith: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 20

PURCHASE OF LAND

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do I understand that amendment No. 3 is agreeable to the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) speaking on behalf of the promoters of the Bill?

Mr. Waller: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Amendment made: No. 3, in page 11, line 27, at end insert—

'(5) Nothing in this Act shall authorise the Board or the Company to purchase or use the land in the London Borough of Camden numbered 88-101 on the deposited plans.'.—*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Clause 28

ABOLITION OF RIGHTS OF REVERTER AND PRE-EMPTION

Mr. Chris Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 17, line 14, leave out clause 28.

We touched on some of the issues relating to the amendment in our discussion on the last group of amendments. The amendment would delete clause 28 on the abolition of rights of reverter and pre-emption. The purpose of clause 28 is to abolish rights given to landowners in the 1840s and 1850s when King's Cross station and the Great Northern railway were created.

Pre-emption means the right to buy back land acquired under the Great Northern Railway Act of 1846, if and when it ceases to be used for railway purposes, and here is the real sting in the tail: pre-emption means the buying back of that land at the original purchase price. Hon. Members will immediately identify the importance of that particular right. The original purchase price was about £100 per acre and, if the land were now available to the original holder at such a price, it would constitute an extremely valuable asset.

The reference to rights of reverter is a reference to the equivalent rights written into contracts for voluntary sale by at least one landowner; so the principle in the case of both rights—pre-emption and reverter—is exactly the same. Those who owned the original land back in the 1850s, who either had the land compulsorily purchased by the railway company or sold it by voluntary agreement, should have the right to re-acquire it if it ceases to be used for railway purposes—and to do so at the original purchase price. British Rail does not require some of the land for railway purposes, and seeks, under clause 28, to override the provisions of the 1846 Act.

Two major organisations have come forward to claim their rights to the land referred to in the clause. Many other people and organisations owned land in the King's Cross station area in the 1850s, and there may well be substantial numbers of descendants of the original owners who, were they aware of their rights under the 1846 Act, would be extremely concerned to learn that clause 28 would remove those rights. We know of two organisations in precisely that position—the special trustees of St. Bartholomew's hospital and the Church Commissioners.

Both organisations have gone to court to prove and protect their rights. They won their case in the chancery division. British Rail appealed and judgment on that appeal is awaited, so the matter is, strictly, sub judice. It is generally believed that, whatever the outcome of the appeal, the matter is likely to go before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

British Rail wants to short-circuit that process. It is intent on abolishing the right of pre-emption and reverter and ensuring that, when any of the land is no longer required for railway purposes—it has used the land and no longer needs it once the works are completed—it can develop that land. For some years now, British Rail and the London Regeneration Consortium have been discussing the possibility of such development, which would be extremely valuable, although the current state of the property market—with 20 or 25 per cent. overcapacity in office space in London and surrounding areas—the package has become somewhat less financially attractive for British Rail and the developers. That is throwing into question some of the financial calculations that British Rail must have been making in relation to the King's Cross project.

The point is quite clear: British Rail wants to hang on to such land even though it no longer requires it to run a railway or a station, and to overturn rights which, for the past 150 years, have pertained to St. Bartholomew's and the Church Commissioners—and, for all we know, many other organisations and individuals. I do not think that it is right that British Rail should seek to overturn such long-standing rights. I do not think that it is right for British Rail to seek to expropriate property which it no longer needs for running a railway.

British Rail should be in the business of creating stations and running trains. BR should not be in the business of taking rights away from the descendants of previous owners of the land to enable BR to make a profit out of property development. That is what clause 28 would make possible. I believe that clause 28 should be removed from the Bill, and that is precisely what my amendment would do.

9.15 pm

Mr. Waller: If the amendment were accepted, it would remove from the Bill a power to be conferred on the British Railways Board to abolish certain rights of reverter and pre-emption that may exist over land specified in clause 28. The bodies that would be affected by the exercise of that power—the Church Commissioners, St. Bartholomew's hospital and the National Freight Corporation—would be suitably compensated. The matter is the subject of litigation between the board and those bodies. The parties are fully protected by the litigation, which, I submit, should be allowed to run its proper course. The question whether the clause should remain in the Bill may then be settled in the other place, when that litigation has been determined. Nothing could be achieved by our accepting the amendment.

[Mr. Waller]

I hope that that answer will satisfy the hon. Gentleman. I do not believe that any good purpose would be achieved by accepting the amendment, and I therefore have to disappoint him.

Mr. Chris Smith: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the hon. Gentleman.

I must confess that I am as disappointed by the hon. Gentleman's response as I expected to be. I did not expect that British Rail would be prepared to give way on this rather important point.

We all hope that the judicial process which is currently under way will take proper and fair cognisance of the rights of not just British Rail but the original owners of the land in question. But, if the hon. Gentleman is so convinced that the judicial process ought to decide this matter, there is no need for British Rail to have this clause in the Bill.

We hope that, when the Bill goes to another place, their Lordships will be mindful of the concern that several of us have expressed in the House about overriding the rights of pre-emption and reverter. It is a matter to which the Committee that considered the Bill referred and on which a number of hon. Members have consistently expressed concern. It is a matter which ought to be, and could be, decided by judicial process rather than by the inclusion of clause 28 in the Bill and I certainly hope that their Lordships will take note of these facts.

I am not convinced by what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I wish to put the matter to the House.

Question put and negatived.

Schedule 1

Descriptions of Works referred to in section 5 of this Act

Mr. Chris Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 20, line 50, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 21.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take the following amendments: No. 8, in page 22, leave out lines 28 to 33.

No. 9, in schedule 2 page 23, leave out line 6.

No. 10, in schedule 3, page 24 leave out line 45.

Mr. Smith: These amendments are of a somewhat detailed nature and relate to some of the specific items of work which are included in the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 seek to delete works Nos. 01 and 014. Those works were proposed by London Underground Ltd. rather than British Rail. They relate entirely to work to the underground concourse at King's Cross, which was recommended in the Fennell report on the tragic fire at King's Cross underground station. Hon. Members will probably recall that some of my constituents died in that fire, as did some of the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). Firefighters from my constituency and his operated with amazing bravery in trying to ensure that the tragic loss of life was kept to a minimum. None of us needs to be reminded of the need to ensure that the proper safety works recommended by Fennell can be carried out.

When London Underground came forward with proposals for works in connection with the Fennell proposals, and included them in the King's Cross Railways Bill, we did not object to them. We wanted to see them on the statute book as quickly as possible. London Underground, being more sensible than British Rail, saw its opportunity and published a separate Bill, the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill, which includes specifically works Nos. 01 and 014.

That Bill has gone through all its stages in this House, and is now under consideration in another place. I am pleased to have been able to assist in ensuring that it got through its procedures in this House quickly. It has leapfrogged the King's Cross Railways Bill and is ahead of it in the queue of private Bills. I hope that it will go through another place quickly, so that the works may be undertaken as soon as possible.

In those circumstances, it seems otiose, to say the least, to have works Nos. 01 and 014 still in the King's Cross Railways Bill. I hope that my amendment, which seeks to delete them, will be acceptable to the promoters of the Bill, because it is nonsense to include them when they are covered by another Bill which is already ahead of the King's Cross Railway Bill in the legislative programme.

Amendment No. 9 seeks to delete access point A8 in Railway street. That access point is redundant for British Rail. If it were used, it would have a severe impact on the residents of Balfe street, which is a small street of residential accommodation. Much of it has been renovated in recent years by the London borough of Islington, and the houses are occupied by council tenants who are my constituents.

The access point is redundant because, under the King's Cross Railways (No. 2) Bill, British Rail seeks a replacement access point known as A27. That Bill has just been deposited and made its initial attempt at Second Reading earlier today. The new access point is at the junction of Railway street and York way. Petitioners against that Bill object to that proposal and have suggested other points in York way that would be preferable and would avoid unnecessary demolition.

Although alternative access points have been proposed by British Rail and local objectors and petitioners, British Rail is still pursuing access point A8, which the amendment seeks to delete. It is worth noting that that access point is less than 30 m from the rear of houses on Balfe street and is at the start of a steep ramp. British Rail's engineering witness said, in front of the Committee that considered the Bill, that he preferred an access point nearer to York way because of the steep ramp, which makes the access point a bad engineering solution for British Rail. Furthermore, the disruption and disturbance of residents in Balfe street should also be taken into account. For all those reasons, it would be sensible to accept the amendment.

Amendment No. 10 seeks to delete Balfe street from the rods to be dug up in the construction of a replacement of the York way sewer. When the works are undertaken, Balfe street will be surrounded by construction work. The amendment is an attempt to remove just one small and unnecessary part of the work that will be inflicted on Balfe street residents. Work No. 13, to which the amendment relates, is a sewer diversion required by the position of the low-level station. At present, the sewer runs down the line at York way, but it will have to be diverted once the enormous low-level box is created by the Bill. The

proposed sewer will run along Railway street from York way and then down Balfe street to Caledonian road, where it will join the existing sewer. So the proposed diversion route will include a new sewer running straight down Balfe street.

Although alternatives were put to the British Rail engineer in Committee, they were rejected for various reasons. However, two weeks after the Committee finally reported, British Rail announced that the sewer could be tunnelled after all and said that there was no need to dig up Balfe street because it could tunnel from the existing sewer to a proposed sewer. That was said at a meeting on 22 May 1991, whereas the Committee had reported on 8 May 1991.

My amendment would remove Balfe street from the list of streets that should be dug up in order to carry out sewer works. It simply seeks to give practical legislative effect to British Rail's claim that it does not need to dig up Balfe street, that it can achieve that sewer diversion by tunnelling. If BR is certain that it can achieve that and that it can carry out the necessary sewer diversion work without having to dig up the whole of the middle of Balfe street, with all the inevitable noise, disturbance and disruption, that will be extremely welcome to the residents. Those residents are already suffering 24 hours a day, seven days a week because of the work that is going on. As a result of the amendment, another additional item of work, which would have an impact on those residents, would be removed.

9.30 pm

That is the import of my amendments. Amendments Nos. 7 and 8 relate to work that British Rail does not need to include in this Bill because London Underground has extracted them and put them in another Bill. Amendment No. 9 relates to an access point, which is not needed because an alternative already exists, as well as another alternative in another Bill. If that work were persisted with, it would create many difficulties for the residents. Amendment No. 10 relates to the diversion of the sewer and the inclusion of work in Balfe street. However, BR has agreed that that work is not specifically required, because the necessary diversion could be achieved by other means.

The amendments are specific and reasonable, and I trust that they will commend themselves to the House. I hope that the sponsor of the Bill will feel able to accept some of my amendments.

Mr. Waller: I am happy to tell the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and the House that amendments Nos. 7 and 8 are acceptable to the promoters.

As the hon. Gentleman explained, those amendments effectively leave out works Nos. 01 and 014. Those works are safety measures recommended in the Fennell report and would be carried out by London Underground Limited. Due to the delay that had been encountered by the promoters of the Bill, London Underground has decided that those essential safety works should be authorised in a separate Bill to be enacted as soon as possible. The London Underground (King's Cross) Bill was therefore deposited in November and provides for the construction of similar works, which will supersede works Nos. 01 and 014. The House will be aware that the latter Bill is expected to be enacted in the current Session. Accordingly, the promoters of this Bill are content to agree to the amendments on the ground that the powers in the Bill are otiose, to repeat the word used by the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury.

I am sorry that amendment No. 9 is not acceptable because it would remove from the Bill the power to form a means of access to Railway street at point A8, as shown on the deposited plans. The power to make an alternative access is being sought by the BR board in the King's Cross Railways (No. 2) Bill, which was deposited in Parliament during this Session. If that Bill is enacted to include that power, the board has acknowledged that it would not then need to make the access at point A8. At this stage it would be premature for the Bill to be amended as proposed since it would not then confer on the board the complete package of powers that are necessary to construct the access point.

The board is prepared to give an undertaking to Parliament at this stage that, if the King's Cross Railways (No. 2) Bill is enacted in a form authorising the board to construct an alternative access on to York way at point A27, as shown in the plans deposited in connection with the No. 2 Bill, it will not exercise the power proposed in this Bill to construct the means of access on to Railway street at point A8. I trust that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that assurance.

Amendment No. 10 is not acceptable either. Its effect would be that the board would not have the power temporarily to stop up or open up the surface of Balfe street. Presumably the amendment was tabled—naturally enough—for the protection of the constituents of the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury who are owners and occupiers of properties in Balfe street and who are to be affected by works at the rear of their properties. It is possible to construct the Balfe street portion of work 13—that is, the sewer—by tunnelling, but it should be understood that some opening up will still be necessary in some places. That is why this provision is vital. Obviously, the board regrets any inconvenience to the owners and occupiers of properties in Balfe street, but the power to open up the street is essential to enable the board to carry out the works required for the diversion of the main sewer.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman has asserted that it is necessary for the board to be able to dig up parts of Balfe street in order to open up for the works, even if the sewer is tunnelled. Is he saying that, in order to construct the tunnel, it is necessary to dig up the surface of the road? That is not credible. Or is he saying that there may be some other purpose in digging up Balfe street? If so, it would be helpful to know exactly what purpose the board has in mind.

Mr. Waller: As I understand it, most of the work originally intended to be carried out by opening up much of the length of the street is now to be carried out in tunnelling, but it is necessary to have access to that tunnelling work. That is why there needs to be some opening up of the street.

In evidence given before the Select Committee, the duration of the portion of works affecting Balfe street was estimated at about nine weeks. There will be disturbance during those nine weeks but I submit that that is a relatively short period considering that the entire works required for the King's Cross project will take a number of years to be brought to fruition.

[Mr. Waller]

I have been able to accept two amendments, which I hope will be to the satisfaction of the hon. Gentleman, and I have been able to give him one assurance, which I hope that he will welcome. I am sorry that I cannot go further, but I am sure that he will understand that the BR board has been anxious to accommodate him as far as it lies within its power to do so.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman have the leave of the House to speak again?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member for Keighley is the bearer of partially good news. The good news is to be welcomed, but before discussing the amendments that he has accepted, I wish to deal with amendments Nos. 9 and 10.

The hon. Gentleman said in connection with amendment No. 9—the deletion of access point A8—that, if British Rail were not given the necessary powers in this Bill, its powers would be incomplete, but that it was seeking alternative arrangements, and that, if they went ahead, it would not want to proceed with A8. The hon. Gentleman phrased his undertaking extremely carefully, however. He gave us an undertaking that access point A8 would not be used and the powers conferred by the Bill in respect of that access point would not be invoked if access point A27, off York way, were given approval.

We are not talking only about British Rail's alternative access point off York way—A27: we are talking also about other proposed access points off York way, which the local residents have proposed as better alternatives to A27. I hope that the undertaking that has been given by the hon. Member for Keighley applies not only to A27, but to any other access point off York way that might in due course be agreed between British Rail and the objectors to the Bill.

I am disappointed by what the hon. Member for Keighley said about amendment No. 10. I remain unconvinced and puzzled by his statement that, despite the fact that the sewer along the Balfe street line can be tunnelled, there will still need to be some access from the surface down to the tunnelled sewer. Knowing that Balfe street is not particularly long—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows this also—I must confess that I find it difficult to see why it is necessary to gain access from the surface of the middle of a relatively short street when one is tunnelling from one end of the street to the other. But that is what the hon. Gentleman has said; it is what British Rail handed him a note to say.

I hope that that point will be reconsidered in due course. If there is no genuine need to get from the surface to the tunnel in Balfe street, there should be no need to dig up that street and to make the lives of my constituents even more of a nightmare than would otherwise be the case.

The hon Member for Keighley betrayed the fallacy of that argument when he said, "What is nine weeks of disturbance compared to the overall period of disturbance that people in the King's Cross area will have to put up with?" That simply reveals how cheaply British Rail is treating the lives and the quality of life of the people who live in the King's Cross area. The people of Balfe street will have to put up with possibly upwards of eight years of constant work immediately outside their homes. As I explained in our debate a couple of weeks ago, much of that work——

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is my hon. Friend aware that, when discussions have taken place on the building of the Jubilee line through various expensive and salubrious parts of London, there has been the most detailed consideration of disturbance, including that caused to Parliament square where some of the works will be carried out? However, the House is apparently proposing to force eight years of disturbance on my hon. Friend's constituents in Balfe street and to do so in this cavalier fashion. Should not British Rail have a bit more consideration for the local people who have grown up and lived with the sound of the railway station and created a decent community around it, but will now see all that torn apart?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I welcome his support on that point. The residents of Balfe street are prime among the people who will be affected by the works. As I have said, the works will continue for eight years—seven days a week, 24 hours a day. That work will take place right outside people's homes. I am sure that the hon. Member for Keighley would not feel particularly happy if such work were to be undertaken next door to his home for eight years.

The hon. Member for Keighley said, in effect, "These people will have to put up with eight years' worth of work, so what's another nine weeks?" It is nine weeks of even more intense noise and disturbance because not only will the back of their homes be being pounded by piledrivers, bulldozers, digging and building but the front of their homes will be pounded by the access works that are required for the sewers. My constituents should not have to put up with this extra work, especially as the hon. Gentleman has not made the case that the work is necessary.

9.45 pm

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend reflect on the personal lives of people affected by this? An elderly constituent of mine with a heart condition applied to the local authority for rehousing and, last year, I was delighted to be able to tell him that he had been offered permanent accommodation in a council property in Balfe street. I wonder about the safety of this person. I thought that I had got him safely rehoused but now he is faced with eight years of work going on outside the house in which he thought that he would live for the rest of his days.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Many people have lived in Balfe street for many years. Others have moved in recently because there is good quality accommodation created over many years by the London borough of Islington. The lives of those people will be affected by the work set out in the Bill and amendment No. 10 would make things just a little easier for them, if that is possible. I do not believe that British Rail requires access from street level down to the tunnel if it is able to tunnel along the sewer. That may need to be considered further in another place.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Keighley has accepted amendments Nos. 7 and 8. That is not much of a concession, because these works are anyway included in another Bill. Nonetheless, we wish the authority for these

works Godspeed on to the statute book. I hope that the London Underground (King's Cross) Bill will reach the statute book soon. When it does so, there will be no need to include works 01 and 014 in this Bill. Therefore, I hope that the House will agree to amendments Nos. 7 and 8.

Amendments made: No. 7, in page 20, line 50 leave out from beginning to end of line 3 on page 21.

No. 8, in page 22, leave out lines 28 to 33.—*[Mr. Chris Smith.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

9.48 pm

Mr. Smith: I shall not trespass on the time of the House by rehearsing some of the arguments that we have made in the many debates on the Bill about the rightness or otherwise of King's Cross as the location for the second international station. I have made my view clear on a number of occasions. I do not believe that it is the right location, although I fully understand the views and wishes of colleagues representing constituencies to the north, who wish for good-quality connections from the north via an international station to the channel tunnel. I share that objective, but I question whether King's Cross is the right location.

I accept that there is an honest disagreement between my hon. Friends and myself in that regard, but I do not believe that King's Cross can cope with an extra 15 million passengers every year. Anyone who has travelled through King's Cross will know that station is already the most overcrowded interchange—both below and above ground—in London. To impose that scale of extra passenger load on an already overcrowded facility would create enormous problems for the immediate area and the passengers who attempt to use that station.

I have frequently argued that case, and still hold to it—but the House has shown in several votes that it takes a different view, and believes that King's Cross is the right location for the second international station. I hope, however, that the Government and my hon. Friends on the Front Bench—soon to become members of the Government—accept that, even if they think that King's Cross is the right location in principle, that does not mean that every jot and tittle of British Rail's specific proposals offers the best way of achieving that objective.

In our debate two weeks ago, I raised the specific issue of the Bill's buffer zone provision, which seeks to ensure that those living in the immediate area of the proposed station will be protected when the works are undertaken. I subsequently exchanged correspondence with British Rail's solicitor, Mr. Osborne, about the properties on the east side of Northdown street, which were not included in the specific buffer zone—that is, the area protected by British Rail's agreement to the Committee's requirements.

I argued that British Rail had failed fully to fulfil its undertaking to the Committee, but its solicitor—to whom I am grateful for replying so promptly—replied that it had done so. He sticks to his original assertion that properties on the east side of Northdown street do not need to be included in the buffer zone.

Having expressed a belief that he was still right in principle, the solicitor to British Rail concluded his letter to me of 28 January:

"However, as a concession to you"—

a concession to me personally, that is—

"we will extend the buffer zone to include properties with a frontage onto so much of the east side of Northdown street as is situated between Pentonville Road and Collier Street."

That is a welcome concession, and I am grateful to British Rail.

We should consider the general question of what the proposals will cost. It is all very well to pass a private Bill and then to think that the job is done, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) pointed out earlier—unless we can be certain that the Government will come up with the money that will enable British Rail to undertake the work, we may find, having spent three years debating the Bill and waited several more months for the other place to debate it, that there is no money to finance that work.

As we all know, when the station was first mooted, the estimate of the costs was about £400 million or £500 million. That was bad enough, but British Rail's most recent estimates—and they are now several months old—mention a total cost of some £1·4 billion. That amount is made up of £610 million for the facilities for channel tunnel and Kent commuter services, £220 million for Thameslink and £570 million for the other works—including the new passenger concourse, new lines into St. Pancras and railway works to facilitate the development of the London Regeneration Consortium land.

At the end of last week, I wrote to the hon. Member for Keighley to ask whether an updated estimate had been produced, relating specifically to the railway works included in the Bill. I have received no response from the hon. Gentleman; he may wish to enlighten us now. For the moment, we have only that enormous figure of £1·4 billion. We know that the Government enthusiastically support the Bill, because they are unofficially whipping to ensure that it is passed. We are entitled to ask the Government whether, in their enthusiastic support for the Bill, they are aware of the enormous magnitude of its financial implications.

Mr. Tony Banks: I assume that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) is referring in part to the article in the *Evening Standard* of Monday 27 January headed "Chunnel doubts grow over King's Cross". The article states that the costs

"have escalated"—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the King's Cross Railways Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Banks: The article states:

"estimates of the project's cost have escalated from £457 million to £1·4 billion"—

the figure mentioned by my hon. Friend—and that it is possible that the scheme will not go ahead. Under those circumstances, I ask him whether it would be wise for the House to proceed with the Bill tonight. Before he answers, and in order to assist all hon. Members, perhaps he will say whether, like me, he wants to press the Bill to a vote at the end of Third Reading?

Mr. Smith: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) for drawing my attention to the article in the *Evening*

[Mr. Smith]

Standard. I am indeed minded to seek a vote on Third Reading at the end of what I hope will be a relatively brief debate.

The issue of finance raised in the *Evening Standard* article to which my hon. Friend draws attention is extremely important. The Government are fond of asking where the money is coming from, but they are supporting a project which, according to old estimates which will probably have to be updated, will cost £1·4 billion. However, the Government do not appear to be currently giving any commitment to provide funds or even to give British Rail the necessary borrowing authority.

The railways division of the Department of Transport wrote a letter to one of my constituents, Mr. R. H. Keynes, of Keystone crescent, whose home will be directly affected by the works. My constituent had sought assurances from the Minister about the financing of the proposed station. The Department of Transport replied:

"Turning to your letter to Mr. Freeman, I cannot answer your detailed questions about the financing of the station, as we have yet to see a full, up-to-date, case on this from BR."

The letter continued:

"The answers to your specific questions to the Minister, are, therefore, that we have seen a certain amount of information on the cost of the King's Cross project"—

we should like to know what that certain amount of information is—

"and the projected revenues before giving consent to the deposit of the Bill."

That was three years ago—the Bill was deposited in 1988. A lot of time has elapsed, there has been a lot of inflation, many cost recalculations, and many changes in the route to get to King's Cross, and many other considerations, such as the creation of Stratford as a major interchange, have intervened in the meantime. The Department of Transport goes on:

"But the project has altered considerably since"—

the Department admits that—

"and a lot of that information is no longer current, particularly on the revenue side. We do not therefore know at this stage whether the station will meet the Government's investment criteria."

In other words, not only do we not have in front of us an exact cost for the works that are being voted through in this Bill—we have to go on the basis of an outdated figure of £1·4 billion, which is in itself an enormous amount—but the Government are saying that they do not have the foggiest idea whether the amount involved will accord with their investment criteria. The Government are dragooning their troops to push the Bill through the House despite the fact that they do not have the faintest idea how they or British Rail will pay for it. That is something of which we ought to be extremely wary.

Mr. Corbyn: During the passage of this Bill, my hon. Friend has made himself an expert on the subject. That being the case, perhaps he can help me. If British Rail goes ahead with the building of this station at a cost of £1·4 billion, what sort of income will it need to secure from the capital developments to service the loan, bearing in mind the fact that the Minister has often said that the Government will put no money into the project?

Mr. Smith: If British Raik were seeking to finance this project entirely out of the relatively small amount of revenue that will come to the station from the operation of the services and from the surrounding property development, it would find that impossible. Even with the property market at its height—I do not need to remind the House that it is not at the height at the moment—British Rail would not be able to cover the £1·4 billion capital cost out of its profit from property development or out of revenue from running the trains.

Of course, that is not a debate that the Government have yet entered into. They have not even set out their parameters for the financing of the station. The only figure that they have been prepared to come up with is bad enough—the initial cost of all the preparatory work involved in making drawings, hiring expensive barristers to put the Bill through the House, and so on.

Last week, I tabled a written question about precisely these costs:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds are being made available to British Rail for design and other work in connection with planning and preparation of the King's Cross project."

The reply that I was given is as follows:

"The external finance limit for BR next year will be £2,041 million. This will allow BR to spend £66 million on design and preparatory work for the King's Cross, Thameslink 2000 and channel tunnel rail link projects."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. *404-5*.]

It is worth pointing out that Thameslink 2000 has been put back a year. The Bill will be deposited next November instead of last November. Therefore, the great bulk of the money to which that answer refers is for the King's Cross and channel tunnel rail link projects. We know that the Government have already given British Rail approval to spend £66 million—an awful lot of money—on the preparatory work. That, of course, makes even more important the question of the ultimate financing. If the Government are prepared to put £66 million into the work now, as well as dragooning hon. Members to push this Bill through the House, they must have—certainly they ought to have—a clearer idea of how they will behave in relation to the ultimate funding of the project when British Rail wants to start work.

Apart from the issue of financing the work——

Mr. Corbyn: The question of financing is important. As the future funding of the project is so uncertain and vague, are we to assume either that there is a private understanding between British Rail and the Government that the Government will pay the capital cost, or that the capital cost will be taken from other British Rail capital investment programmes, such as rail electrification?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. I simply remind the House of some of the items of expenditure which British Rail seeks to undertake. All are extremely worthwhile projects, including the upgrading of the west coast main line at a cost of £750 million and the electrification of the midlands main line at a cost of £315 million.

Mr. Cryer: I caution my hon. Friend about using those figures. The east coast main line has been electrified, according to figures provided by the Minister, at a cost of £470 million. At 1990-91 prices, the original cost of the west coast main line electrification in the 1960s was £1,900 million. In other words——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. None of this has anything to do with the Third Reading debate.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All those points have been covered——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a point of order. The hon. Gentleman knows better than to start challenging my ruling.

Mr. Smith: I certainly——

Mr. Cryer: The King's Cross development may draw money away from the projects that my hon. Friend has listed. The Government figures for investment, although accurate, represents investment on the cheap and not the full cost required for a decent job.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend may be right. I do not claim to be an expert on the detailed financing of particular aspects of railway work, but I know that there are many useful and worthwhile projects which British Rail could undertake. Apart from the projects that I have mentioned, there is the electrification of the trans-Pennine routes, the electrification of the Perth-Inverness line, the modernisation of the London, Tilbury and Southend line, Thameslink 2000 and the potential modernisation of the north Kent line.

Those are important and worthwhile projects, and we must ask the Government where the money for them will come from, especially if £1·4 billion is gobbled up by the proposals for King's Cross.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I know that my hon. Friend realises that many north-west and north-east Members have been careful not to intervene in the debate because we understand the strength of feeling in my hon. Friend's constituency. I hope that my hon. Friend will bear in mind the fact that there is another calculation which he has not mentioned. What will happen to all those projects if none of them has access to the channel tunnel and to the rapid movement of freight and passengers around the London area? Without the King's Cross terminal, there may be real problems.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend is mistaken in including freight in her remarks, because the Bill contains no proposals on freight. The proposal is not for freight traffic to go through King's Cross. That issue is completely separate from the Bill.

Precisely this question was raised at an earlier stage in our discussions, and I pointed out then that the Government had not come clean at all on the issue of freight and what would happen to freight. I share the desire of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) in wanting to see not just passenger traffic but freight able to make a direct contact with the channel tunnel from all parts of the country, especially the north and the north-west. I share her desire to ensure that the channel tunnel becomes a tool for economic regeneration around the country.

This Bill, however, has nothing whatever to do with the movement of goods from the north of the country to the channel tunnel. It does have something to do with the movement of passengers from the north of the country to the channel tunnel, but, as I have already explained, I do not believe that King's Cross is essential to achieve that end. However, even if one takes the view that King's Cross is essential, there are better and more appropriate ways of building and developing a new station at King's Cross than the one that British Rail has effectively forced upon us. Considerations of finance are important in relation to that, because I do not believe that British Rail has to build an underground station in order to achieve its purpose.

What impact will the proposed station have on its environment and especially on traffic? According to British Rail and the Department of Transport's own published estimates, the new low-level station will double the number of rail passengers passing through the King's Cross station complex during the morning peak hours. It will double the number of vehicles that will come into King's Cross or St. Pancras during the morning peak hours.

The station and office development together will increase the traffic on Euston road during the evening peak hours by 70 per cent. Anyone who has tried travelling in a bus or car on Euston road in the evening rush hour will know that it is bad enough at present; to impose an additional 70 per cent. of traffic on that major artery will cause enormous congestion. That takes no account of the 100 per cent. increase in traffic which is likely to occur in the morning peak hours.

British Rail and the Government must therefore take some notice, at the very least, of the traffic implications of the Bill. It is all very well to say, as I am sure the hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) will say—because it is what British Rail has said for months—that the great majority of passengers coming into King's Cross on the channel tunnel trains will go to further destinations by public transport, but there will also be many hundreds of thousands of passengers in a year who will want to be met by friends in cars, who will want to get on to coaches if they are in large parties or who will want to take taxis.

The traffic implications of what is proposed are enormous, and I hope that British Rail and the Government will take cognisance of the fact that we do not want to create around King's Cross a traffic jam far worse than anything that we have to put up with at present.

Mr. Corbyn: My hon. Friend knows King's Cross well. I am not aware of any proposal to upgrade the Piccadilly or Victoria lines, which carry the majority of passengers to and from King's Cross. If those lines cannot cope during the rush hour at present, how will they cope with double the traffic?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friends makes a valid point. British Rail has consistently argued that people will get off the channel tunnel trains and get on to one of the five underground lines going through King's Cross station, and that that will somehow solve the problem of increased passenger traffic. It will not. Even if a new underground concourse is built—that is one of the proposals that is being advanced—nowhere in the Bill is it proposed that a single extra train should run on the Victoria, Piccadilly or Northern lines, or on any of the other lines that run through King's Cross. The tube trains are already packed during the rush hour, and there is no proposal in the Bill to ensure that extra services are provided. Both below ground and above it, the traffic implications will be absolutely massive.

I have explained why I think that the Government should come clean on the financing of the project and why the traffic and congestion implications of the proposals will be enormously painful for the King's Cross area. In addition to all that, my constituents will have to put up with untold damage to their lives, homes, shops and other properties—both immediately and in the years to come.

[Mr. Smith]

It is worth reminding the House what the Bill, if enacted in its present form, would involve: the loss of 83 homes, the displacement of 326 residents, the demolition of four listed buildings, the destruction of well over 10 acres of property in two conservation areas, the destruction of a two-acre inner-city nature reserve of great value to the local community, the loss of 168 workplaces providing 1,620 jobs, the loss of 58 shops, 38 of which provide key services to local people, the diversion of a major traffic artery for a period of three years, a doubling of the number of rail passengers and a doubling of the number of cars and taxis coming to King's Cross and St. Pancras during the morning peak hour.

In addition to all that, the project will involve six years of construction work on the station and two years of construction work on the post-station development. That work will be in progress 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It will be taking place immediately beside, behind and in front of the homes of a large number of my constituents.

Sincerely though I respect the wish of hon. Members on both sides of the House to ensure that their constituents can benefit from access to the channel tunnel—I have no desire to stand in the way of their efforts to make that wish come true—I urge that the interests of my constituents, who will have to put up with untold misery for an extended eight-year period, should be given closer consideration than BR has given them hitherto. BR could have come to us at the outset and said, "King's Cross has to be the location for a whole series of railway reasons, but let us talk about how best to ensure that the building of the station has minimal impact on local people and their lives."

If it had done that, we might have had a sensible dialogue with British Rail, but it did not. It came forward with these proposals, and it has attempted to bludgeon them through the House. It was, quite rightly, fiercely criticised by the Select Committee for the way in which it behaved in trying to get its proposals through the Committee and the House. It has not listened on a whole series of points, even though I am very grateful that amendments have been agreed to in the course of our debate this evening.

I shall vote against the Third Reading of the Bill tonight, but my intention is not to deprive the north of access to the channel tunnel. That is the last thing in my mind. My intention is to try to persuade British Rail and the Government to take more reasonable notice of the needs, requirements and quality of life of my constituents.

10.26 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I am grateful for the opportunity to record the fact that the Government support the Bill and encourage all hon. Members to vote in favour of Third Reading, so that the Bill can proceed to another place for further consideration.

The Government support British Rail's plan to have the terminus of a high speed rail link at King's Cross. They also support the plans of London Underground to have, under the powers of this Bill, extensive work carried out at King's Cross to improve facilities there and also to improve commuter services—the Thameslink services which run north-south through King's Cross. These are all laudable aims.

The hon. Members for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) referred to an article in the *Evening Standard*. May I make it plain, as my Department has done consistently over the past three years of consideration of the Bill in the House, that this is indeed a mammoth project, that the appraisals of such a project inevitably change over time as the project changes in costs and revenue. It is not possible to come to a firm conclusion about this project in financial terms at the moment.

British Rail remains convinced that, the appraisal tests that we have set can be met; that is to say, for InterCity and for the international services, an 8 per cent. return. For the social services, that is for Thameslink and for the underground services in London, wider social benefits are taken into account, such as road decongestion, social regeneration and economic benefits to the City of London through such construction.

British Rail remains convinced that, when it puts the detailed investment proposition to us, once planning permission is obtained, it will pass the appraisal test. The House would not expect me to give any assurances about the timing of construction and the extent to which the investment appraisal test will be met. But the Government are committed to the Bill. We believe very strongly that planning permission should be given to permit construction to start, to bring benefits not only to the metropolis but to the north-east, the north-west and other parts of the country to which rail services will run from King's Cross to other great cities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Corbyn: Before the Minister leaves this subject of the cost of the development, could he be more specific about it? British Rail has given a figure of £1·4 billion for the construction of the station complex. The Minister has said that there will be appraisal tests for the rail linkages in and out of it and their viability in return on capital, and so forth. He has not said what return on capital will have to be attained from the station in order to service the loan to construct the station, unless he intends to make a very large Government grant available for that construction.

Mr. Freeman: I hoped that I had made it quite plain that there are several different constituent parts of the project. For the non-commercial parts of the operation, the Government's present procedure for funding such investments, for example by Network SouthEast or London Underground, is to take into account, where appropriate, the wider non-user benefits—I gave the House examples of such non-user benefits—and to finance London Underground by grant and British Rail by passenger service obligation grant, which is a revenue grant, and then by loan sanction permission to borrow. The revenue impact for social railway investment is met by increases in the passenger service obligation grant. If the hon. Gentleman wants to table a question or write to me, I shall be glad to enlarge upon that.

As I have said, the Government support the Bill. We think that it is appropriate not only that King's Cross should be the terminus for a rail link but that underground and Network SouthEast facilities should be improved at that station. We urge the House to give the Bill a Third reading.

10.30 pm

Mr. Snape: I, too, will be extremely brief. I believe that there are objectives that should be endorsed, not because the Bill favours one part of the country at the expense of another but because an international terminal, as well as a through station, at King's Cross will benefit the whole country. Indeed, I believe, as do many of my hon. Friends, that from a railway point of view there is no alternative to King's Cross.

That is not to say that the Minister has not left questions unanswered, not least the one just put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). We are confused about the financing of this great development. The *Evening Standard* article, to which he referred, emphasises his confusion. The terms in which he wrote to various organisations, talking about commercial viability or otherwise, also caused confusion.

The station will benefit not just international passengers. There will be benefits for domestic rail services to which the Minister referred. None of those benefits—neither those for the international services nor their domestic counterparts—could come from building the terminal anywhere else, such as Stratford or the other places which have been mentioned. Because of the geographical location of King's Cross and its easy connections to other parts of the country, it is not just the obvious choice but the only choice.

I have been involved for many years with the channel tunnel project as a whole and its associated terminal at King's Cross. I think that I am the only hon. Member to have served on two Select Committees on the channel tunnel. During the period in which the Conservatives have been in power it was said, first, that we needed only one terminal, Waterloo. Then it was decided that we needed two terminals.

Originally, the Government and British Rail management said that there was no need for a dedicated rail route from the channel ports, and that we could manage with the existing railway infrastructure. Then it was said that we needed a dedicated rail route, which would pass through Kent, and which would obviously affect the prospects of some Conservative Members in marginal constituencies. Despite the need to spend hundreds of millions of pounds of public money on property acquisition, overnight we had the proposal for an eastern route into Stratford—a defeat for the Secretary of State, if we are to believe what we read in the newspapers, who wanted the original route.

The confusion about the project has been made worse by the Government's vacillation and indecision, and also by their lack of answers to my hon. Friends about where the finance for the project will come from.

Mr. Chris Smith: My hon. Friend is right in the point that he is putting to the Minister. He will recall that, when British Rail proposed that Waterloo should be the first channel tunnel station, not only did it say that one station was sufficient and that it did not need a second one but, in the case which it put to the House of Lords during the discussions, it said specifically that King's Cross was not an appropriate location for a second station. British Rail was ruling out King's Cross at that stage, yet two or three years later BR tells us that King's Cross is essential.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend underlines the confusion which has reigned over the project, certainly during the past decade and probably for some time before that.

On the point about additional traffic the Minister overlooked the fact that the new terminal will be a combination of King's Cross and St. Pancras, which, from a railway point of view, is considerably under-utilised. I have no figures on the throughput of passengers in those stations' heyday, but I hazard a guess that considerably more passengers now use the combined stations.

Mr. Corbyn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Snape: With respect, I shall not give way because my hon. Friend has not been present for much of the debate. I know that he wants to speak on Third Reading and no doubt he will make his point later.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North agrees that the total number of passengers using King's Cross and St. Pancras in those stations' heyday was considerably more than the number who use the combined stations today. I am worried when people say that it is fine to live next to a railway station but that one must never use it to its full capacity. That does not appear to be sensible——

Mr. Corbyn: Who says that?

Mr. Snape: Various pressure groups make that point about both the London terminuses. They are apparently quite relaxed about living next to railway stations, provided they are not used to their full capacity. I neither understand nor share that view.

I realise that my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in other parts of the country are still waiting to hear something that was implied during the passage of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) says that the Bill has been railroaded through the House, but I remind him that it is three long years since it was introduced. If that is a railroad, it is pretty slow, and I would not look forward to travelling on it.

None of us believes that a real alternative to King's Cross exists, although we are not particularly happy about British Rail's proposals. I give my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury an undertaking that we are committed to a terminal at King's Cross, but we are not necessarily committed to the expensive and grandiose project, which seems to depend on property values that were optimistic three or four years ago and are hopelessly pessimistic now. I hope that the Minister will attempt, in his final few weeks in office, to clarify exactly which part of the station the Government are prepared to support financially. So far, an answer on that has been lacking from him and other Ministers.

After three years, it is time to draw this saga to a close. I hope that my hon. Friends will support the Bill, because the principle of a terminal station and an international channel tunnel station at King's Cross cannot be challenged.

10.37 pm

Mr. Waller: I shall not strain the good will of hon. Members who have supported the Bill by speaking for more than a few moments. I should like to speak longer, because the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) spoke about the losses that he envisages would be incurred by the development of the station at King's Cross, and if I had the time I should love to expand on the economic benefits that could be achieved

[Mr. Waller]

in employment terms, the environmental benefits that would accrue to the area and the safety benefits that would be brought about by the Fennell provisions in the Bill.

However, I shall desist from following that course and merely state that the co-ordinated package of works in the Bill will make King's Cross a first-class interchange between international trains and inter-city services from the east midlands, the north and Scotland, as well as to and from Thameslink and London Underground services. With the short transfer to Euston station, passengers will have an interchange to and from the north-west and the midlands.

The Bill will also provide for the expansion of the successful Thameslink service and create new cross-London routes. It will enable the promoters greatly to improve capacity and the safety of passenger flows at the London underground station. Several hon. Gentlemen referred to the problems that will result from the increased throughput of passengers. However, the concourse will be enlarged and the facilities will be compatible with the new British Rail station, which will be able to handle many more passengers.

There has been a highly informed debate on the King's Cross Bill since the day my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) moved the Second Reading in May 1989. My hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) was originally associated with the Bill. He has spoken with authority on other transport-related Bills. It took an historic 53 days to get the Bill through Committee, under the expert chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who was present on the Front Bench today. It is curious that those two hon. Gentlemen were snatched away from their work on the Bill to enter the Whips Office.

I thank all those who have contributed to the debate, not least the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury, who has stoutly defended the interests of his constituents as he sees them. I also thank all those other hon. Members who have supported the Bill loyally on a number of occasions because they believe that it is in the best interests of the country.

I now ask for the Bill to be allowed to move swiftly to another place. I commend it to the House.

10.40 pm

Mr. Corbyn: I must tell the House, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) so graciously remarked, that I was not here for part of the debate. I had a prior engagement that I could not break, but I was present for the latter one and half hours of the debate.

I intend to vote against the Third Reading of the Bill. I must put on record the appreciation felt by many people in the borough of Islington of the work done by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith). He has sought to protect his constituency and the environment of London by arguing for some sane planning principles for the construction of a major railway station of national importance.

The project should not be pushed through the House by means of the private Bill procedure, which is wholly inappropriate. The Government appear to hide behind British Rail when it suits them and behind the private Bill procedure and financial gobbledegook when it suits them. They have not a clue about what they intend to do about the station.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) has assiduously promoted this awful project. He has said that we may be approaching its final stage and that it is about to go to the other place. Is that really so? After all, the Minister has admitted that he does not know where the money for the project will come from. He is still thinking about that. He has had only three years to think about that, but, obviously, that is not long enough.

The Minister is aware that land prices in London are falling. However, the entire finance for the project is supposed to come from the development of property in the area to the north of King's Cross. That proposition is simply not feasible because there is not enough money to be made from that property. Therefore, the money for the project must either come from Government grant—the Minister's predecessors set their faces against such grants for major railway construction—or money must be taken away from other BR capital projects. However, those projects are dear to the hearts of many people.

Does BR intend to spend £1·4 billion on the construction of the station and £400 million on the construction of the link between Stratford and King's Cross in tunnel? The Secretary of State has confirmed that that link must be in tunnel. We are talking about the expenditure of £2 billion on a railway project. However, even at the zenith of the London property boom, sufficient money could not have been raised from office development to the north of King's Cross.

Those who think that we have heard the last of this subject should think again. I have a feeling that, in about a year, BR will quietly announce that it cannot afford the project after all. We will then end up with a half-baked rail network. A new line will run through Kent to an under-utilised and under-developed station in Stratford; all because BR is not prepared to allow it to be the major terminal. BR will be unable to afford the link through to King's Cross and Waterloo will be the inadequate terminal for channel tunnel trains for a long time until that new line through Kent is built. When that happens, some trains will go to Waterloo and some to Stratford. That will provide a totally unsatifactory link to the channel tunnel.

Those colleagues who believe that those of us who are anti the development at King's Cross are anti the rest of the country should think again.

We are arguing for a sane and sensible process of railway planning for major projects. British Rail has spent a great deal of money in the past three years on public relations and lobbying exercises and on printing super-glossy documents. One can hardly move around King's Cross for BR consultants stopping one in the street to explain what a good thing it would be to have one's house knocked down to make way for the station.

That the channel tunnel will be built is obvious—it is happening. That the links with London will be built at some stage is less obvious—I hope that they will be. I urge colleagues to consider for a moment in whose interests this massive project is supposed to work. Many hon. Members, particularly Labour Members, seem to be labouring under the illusion that King's Cross will somehow aid the economic development of the north of England, and of Wales and Scotland, because it will improve freight transportation through to the channel tunnel. The development as proposed has nothing to do with freight

transport: it is a passenger terminal and station. Developing economic links between this country and France and the other European countries will not be achieved by building King's Cross station, because it does nothing for freight transport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury ably discussed the effects on the area in detail. I can understand that some hon. Members are desperate to get the King's Cross development built because they think that it will speed their passage to a channel tunnel train and thence to Europe. Dedicated trains need not go though King's Cross if it is not the terminal. They can go around to Stratford and on from there. Non-dedicated trains—InterCity trains—would go to King's Cross and if the terminal was at Stratford passengers would have to transfer to Stratford.

Non-dedicated trains coming from the north-west would go to Euston. Therein lies a problem. Everyone knows that it is not exactly next door to King's Cross or St. Pancras. That is thanks to the free-enterprise railway developments of the 1840s and 1850s—instead of developing a proper London terminal, several of them were developed. That problem remains with us to this day.

British Rail talks grandly of a travelator running between Euston and King's Cross. When that was first proposed, it was forgotten that the Government were also building the British Library, which goes down five floors underground—a bit deep for a travelator, unless it is a big dipper sort of travelator. So that connection is not possible.

How passengers, therefore, are to get from Euston to the new channel tunnel terminal at King's Cross is unclear, unless they are to walk or take a bus running through the traffic in Euston road. That serious problem has not been dealt with. Those in the north-west or the west of England who think that they will have a direct link to the channel tunnel terminal are wrong. But people in the west of England may well have a direct link into a channel tunnel station at Stratford if the crossrail construction goes ahead. All these issues seem to be passing the House by.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury argued reasonably for some environmental protection for his constituents around the station, but his arguments have been brushed aside as though he were obstructing national progress and singlehandedly holding up the economic boom that this country is thrusting towards. Would any hon. Member tolerate in his constituency, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, for eight years, unrestricted work on a major construction site?

This Bill is a Trojan horse for other major developments in other areas. If it is good enough for wealthy commuter areas of the country to have protection from motorway building contractors—traffic schemes, banking works and all the other improvements that they rightly demand and get—it is good enough for people in inner city areas to enjoy the same protection. Other hon. Members might care to reflect on those issues before allowing the scheme to go through.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury said that eight listed buildings would be destroyed. We are talking about an interesting and historic area. Damage would also be caused to the Camley street open space. That might seem totally irrelevant to those who come from the rolling acres of hunting country, but the Camley street open space is precious to the children and young people who developed that land into a natural park. I know that it will be replaced under British Rail's proposals—and will be slightly larger in area—but hurt will be caused to people who put an awful lot of effort into the development.

There is also the question of traffic and passenger usage of the area. My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East pointed out that St. Pancras station is underutilised. I tried to intervene to agree with him on that point and to ask him to agree with me that one problem with British Rail and London Underground is that they seem to imagine that more and more passengers can be brought into the King's Cross-St. Pancras complex without doing anything about the shortage of space on the underground trains that will then take those passengers.

It is no good bringing 15 million passengers a year into the King's Cross terminal unless there is some means of getting them away. If they cannot get on the Underground trains, they will go for a bus. If they cannot get on a bus, they will go for a taxi, but Euston road, Pentonville road and York way are already jammed, and that situation will get worse as a result of the development. That increase in traffic will lead to greater congestion and greater pollution, but apparently such things are of no concern to the planners behind the development or to the Government.

I shall oppose the Third Reading. I have a feeling that we shall all be back here again in the not-too-distant future, thinking again about the whole question of the lack of planning of this country's rail network. At the heart of this debate is the lack of importance that this country attaches to its rail network. I am a strong supporter of the rail network and the railway system. We cannot maintain a railway system by insisting on financing it by constantly creaming off and selling its assets year after year, and by insisting that new developments are financed by property speculation on the part of the railway board. That is not the way to do it.

We should take a leaf out of the books of other countries that have put large amounts of public investment into the railways, knowing that that will take traffic off the roads, reduce the level of air pollution and provide for a more efficient country. We are allowing some grandiose white elephant to be constructed around King's Cross without thinking of the implications for the rest of the country in terms of the loss of capital going into the project, the increase in traffic and pollution around the area and with the illusion that that somehow creates a better freight and passenger link to the continent, when we know that it will not.

There is a viable alternative just down the line at Stratford, where there is a large amount of open space that could be developed into a major terminal. King's Cross will be a secondary terminal, and I have a feeling that we shall end up with second best all round.

10.53 pm

Mr. Cryer: I want to express some reservations about the Bill, basically because of the Government's lack of gratitude, to which my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) has referred. I am very much in favour of what my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) referred to as a doubling of railway passengers. I wish that the number of railway passengers would increase, with a commensurate expansion of the railway network.

[Mr. Cryer]

However, we are talking here only about railway passengers, not about a very important component of railway traffic, especially for the manufacturing industries of the north, which many of us represent—and that is freight. If we are to reverse the domination of our roads by heavy wagons and road lorries, we must do something about getting freight off the roads and on to rail, but the Bill does nothing about that.

The Minister should have said that the Government are prepared to provide a guarantee, should the financial system on which British Rail depends fail to deliver. The Bart's hospital case—I cannot expand on that, because it is sub judice—has placed a major source of funds in peril, because the Government have forced British Rail to depend on development or property sales to provide the revenue to finance this £1·4 billion project.

I shall not go into the components of that figure, because several other hon. Members have already put them on the record. However, I am concerned because this project, which many hon. Members have described as grandiose, may soak up investment funds for the provincial areas of British Rail into King's Cross. Other projects would be of greater advantage to the north and the provincial sector than this one, which will put £1·4 billion into the construction and covering of one of the largest holes in the ground in Europe.

For example, the electrification of the midland main line out of St. Pancras is not one of the works in the Bill, but it would cost only £400 million under the rather cheap methods that has been imposed on British Rail, which is required to find an 8 per cent. return on capital investment. That has led to cuts in capital investment, which has meant that the east coast mainline electrification is becoming a byword for inconsistency and low levels of operation in adverse weather conditions.

Rather than supporting the Bill, we should be urging the Government to authorise the electrification of the midland main line up through Sheffield to Leeds. If a crossrail link were built in Bradford, for what would be a tiny amount of capital investment when compared to the £1·4 billion to be spent on King's Cross, there could be then be through trains running up the electrified midland main line, to Bradford interchange and across to Foster square and then up to Settle and Carlisle, and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)—the old London, Midland and Scottish scheme.

That would make use of that great main line, the capacity of which is vastly underutilised. My fear is that the investment to develop these routes to the north will not be available, as the Government will not give British Rail the finance that is needed because everything will have gone on the King's Cross project.

Another scheme that would be of great advantage to my constituency would be the electrification of the trans-Pennine route, from Leeds up to the Bradford interchange and then across to Halifax and through to the Lancashire capital of Manchester and across to Liverpool. At the moment, it is diesel-operated and the commuter services are overcrowded. More investment is needed. Despite interventions, the Minister has told us nothing about the effect of this investment on the rest of British Rail.

I want electrification of the trans-Pennine route, because it would be a real boost to the north. It will be eight years before the King's Cross route is finished, and therefore at least eight years before the north sees any benefit. Furthermore, freight, which is already decreasing fast on British Rail, will be further marginalised.

The Government are giving no incentives to encourage freight to return from road to rail. We should be looking carefully at the alternatives to see which would be of most benefit to the north in the short term, rather than allowing the development of a grandiose white elephant in King's Cross, which will soak up money and will not be of any benefit for 10 years. We need Government action now, and I am disappointed with their lack of response. It simply is not good enough.

The Minister ought to know that the money is not available to finance a major development on the basis that he outlined tonight. Part of that basis—apart from the public spending obligation that he mentioned—was increased property values, but that trend has been reversed. Higher property values were the basis on which British Rail stated that no direct public expenditure would be required for the King's Cross development.

I have grave reservations about that scheme, and in common with others of my hon. Friends, I want to see the development of an important and progressive rail network. I doubt whether the Bill will provide the basis for that.

11 pm

Mr. Tony Banks: I address my remarks to my hon. Friends, who ought to ask themselves whether, if we were in government, we would approach the matter in this way. The answer must be no. They must know in their hearts of hearts that we would not have used the private Bill procedure to determine a project of such significance to the nation as the construction of the second channel tunnel station.

It distresses me that British Rail has divided this side of the House. It is not a matter of arguing for Islington or for Stratford, but of what the whole country wants. It is manifest from recent press stories that, because the property market has collapsed and the budget is out of hand, the project will not go ahead.

I make the point to my hon. Friends that an attempt to destroy the Bill is being made not because of narrow constituency interests but because the decision in question is too important to consider under the private Bill procedure. We are not arguing the south versus the north, but we ask our hon. Friends to consider that a strategic decision should be taken in a different fashion. That is why I cannot support the Bill's Third Reading.

This issue will return to the House again before long, so even at this late moment I urge my hon. Friends also to vote against Third Reading.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 165, Noes 5.

Division No. 59] **[11.02 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Alton, David
Amess, David
Anderson, Donald
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin

Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blunkett, David
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carr, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dover, Den
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fyfe, Maria
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gordon, Mildred
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Irvine, Michael
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lewis, Terry
Lightbown, David
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCartney, Ian
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McMaster, Gordon
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Mills, Iain
Morley, Elliot
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parry, Robert
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Raffan, Keith
Redmond, Martin
Redwood, John
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Snape, Peter
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stephen, Nicol
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger Knapman and
Mr. Alistair Burt.

NOES

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Leadbitter, Ted
Nellist, Dave
Skinner, Dennis

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Chris Smith and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Uncertificated Securities

Postponed proceeding on Question, That the draft Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 19th December, *resumed.*

11.13 pm

The Minister for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): Before the interruption at 7 pm, I was saying that there are a number of measures to help small shareholders—the complaints commissioner, the compensation scheme and a system allowing small shareholders to lock up their holdings and ask that they are not released unless they give special permission. I shall be happy to respond to any points made, but, in view of the lateness of the hour, I commend the regulations to the House.

11.14 pm

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): I welcome the Minister's short introduction of these regulations governing stock exchange transactions. We welcome the regulations.

We have been waiting many years for the legal underpinning of TAURUS, which is at last provided in the paperless electronic transfer system announced in legislative form today. To be precise, we have been waiting for 13 years. It is a full 13 years since the Group of 30 first set down internationally agreed standards for settlement of share transactions, and it is a full 10 years since the London stock exchange formally responded with the concept of TAURUS.

The Opposition sincerely hope that tonight sees the end of the Government's procrastination in the implementation of TAURUS. We do not want to have to sit through the experience of individuals at the stock exchange thinking of reasons for further delays. One's sympathy goes out to Peter Rawlins, the chief executive of the stock exchange, when he has to come up with excuse after excuse. The poor man is quoted as having said, when he had to announce further delays:

"This is another disappointing blow to our aspirations."

It is a relief that he will not have to come up with any more such remarks.

As I have said, we have waited 10 years for the Government and the stock exchange to come up with some practical proposals. Throughout the years, we have witnessed minimal progress but a lot of buck-passing to explain the delays to which we have been subjected. The stock exchange, in its polite, indirect fashion of briefing, has discreetly said that the delays are due to the Government's late legal advice and to the fact that the Government's drafting was behind schedule.

On the other hand, the less delicate and more heavy-handed briefing of the DTI explains that the delay is due to the Stock Exchange's lack of correct computerisation or the inadequacy of staffing levels. In any case, there has been bickering between the two bodies as to why the process has taken so long, why it has been delayed month by month and year by year, until we are now waiting for May 1993.

If there is a further delay—one seriously worries that there may be—neither the stock exchange nor the DTI will be blamed. This time there will be another target. We shall be waiting for the annual general meetings at which companies will have to pass the regulations. No doubt the shareholders will be blamed for any further delays. It has been a sad tale of delay and procrastination. One has been waiting so long for the Government and the stock exchange to come up with some practical proposals that one is tempted to welcome almost anything as better than nothing. DTI Ministers must be grateful to the Prime Minister for delaying the election long enough to allow these regulations to stand as the Government's final memorial.

In a sense, it no longer matters who is to blame—the stock exchange or the DTI. It is petty squabbling. At this late stage, we are just relieved to see the regulations going through. But at another level, the delay is in some ways a good case study of the problems that we have seen at the DTI over the years.

This is an example of the lack of leadership, the lack of drive, that we have seen in Minister after Minister. We have had Secretary of State after Secretary of State—as many as we have had years. The TAURUS delay is indicative of that kind of lack of management and lack of direction. That is why the DTI has come to be known in some quarters as the Department of total inertia.

I want to emphasise this point, which is not a cheap debating point.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Exactly.

Ms. Mowlam: If the hon. Member wants to intervene, I shall give him numerous other examples of the way in which the DTI reacts to a problem that has become too large to ignore. The Department does not take the initiative in solving problems. TAURUS is an example of the way in which it lets problems fester year after year.

I want to make it clear that we are committed to the forging of a constructive partnership with the stock exchange, as with other parts of the financial sector. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) may laugh, but the partnership that we have seen over the years has resulted in arguments between Departments and the City. Institutions like the stock exchange and the DTI have had arguments. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Wyre Forest may snigger in disbelief, but if he goes to France and Germany he will find Governments that work in partnership with industry because they want to encourage an active leadership role as they move into the 1990s. That is what we want for the financial services industry in this country.

I shall emphasise the main criticisms or problems that we perceive, and I shall welcome the Minister's response to them. First, the Government have shown that they have no clear and strategic approach to financial services. Their approach to equity holding is a good example of that. We have heard the Minister argue in favour of wider share ownership when the Government have underpriced privatisation issues in the hope of attracting small investors.

The thrust of the TAURUS proposals that are before us is the same as that of the big-bang reforms because they will favour large transactions from institutional investors. The Minister has said that the Government are interested in helping and protecting the small investor, and he mentioned lock-up and other facilities, but that is surely going a point too far if the process of introducing TAURUS means that the small investor is lost. I have no doubt that the economies of scale will mean cost savings for the larger players while the smaller players will lose out.

I hope that the Minister will not lower himself by using the hypocritical argument that smaller investors can use their votes at annual general meetings, if they do not want to use TAURUS, to stop company directors dematerialising. As he and I well know, company directors need only twist the arms of institutional investors, with the result that they will have the 75 per cent. interest that they need to ride through AGMs. In other words, there will be a negative outcome for the small investor.

Given the scandals that we have seen in the City in financial services in the past few years, we are seeing the establishment of a parallel regulatory regime for the TAURUS system rather than integration into the structure of the Financial Services Act 1986. We have often seen that self-regulation, without any accountability to an outside authority such as the Securities and Investments Board, is courting trouble for the future. That is scarcely likely to appeal to overseas investors.

The Minister talked about the role of account holders, and the problems with the present regulatory structure are well illustrated in that context. If we are considering the fitness and properness of account holders, it is for the stock exchange to define them as fit and proper. I am sure that the Minister understands that, to avoid costly duplication, the stock exchange will be dependent on the self-regulatory bodies for the testing of "fit and proper". That means that the stock exchange will be dependent ultimately on outside sources for defining the fitness and properness of account holders.

I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House can envisage situations in which there will be disagreement between the stock exchange and the self-regulatory organisations over the quality and validity of different information. That is the result of the parallel structure of regulation that the Government propose.

Another criticism is that the compensation fund arrangements have not been properly structured. The Opposition argue that £250,000 is not a large enough sum in view of the transactions that are involved. Given the long debate that has taken place on compensation, it would seem that the same view is taken by many others. In May, when it was suggested that the level would be much higher, the Minister said that, in the event of something going wrong, there would be substantial compensation.

Since then—I am sure that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—we have had the battle between lax regulation/high compensation and tight regulation/low compensation; and what we have ended up with this evening is both lax regulation and low compensation. That is one of the weaknesses that we see in the compensation fund arrangements before us tonight.

It also furthers some of the problems of the compensation schemes in the City for the various financial services that we have seen manifested in previous years, because, with the TAURUS compensation fund outside the investor compensation scheme, the present system forgoes the opportuity to draw on a wider pool of contributors and hence improve the management of risk.

Those are the main questions that we on this side have about the regulations. The regulations are complex. Some of the complexity of the legislation is lessened by the fact that some of the details, as I understand it, will be put in the new rule book that will not come before the House. The Secretary of State will agree to the stock exchange's new rule book for TAURUS operators, and it is important at this point to say that the next Secretary of State in the Department will look at the rule book carefully; we want to ensure that it is clear and coherent. But we want no further delays in a system that has already waited so many years for its implementation.

TAURUS is essential to maintain London's position as the top financial centre of Europe. We worry that the delays of previous years have helped to call into question the role that the financial institutions perform. With the French systems up and running in the Paris Bourse and the German Government making a concerted effort to modernise Frankfurt, there is no room for complacency such as we have seen in the Department of Trade and Industry in years gone by. A Labour Government will not be encumbered by misplaced loyalty to the Financial Services Act 1986. We will cut through the present jumble of responsibilities and plethora of bodies to achieve a streamlined system of regulations.

In the financial services industry, long-term business growth can only be achieved when the customer has confidence in the sound governance of the market. What we have seen up to now is not that. We want to see good business and good regulation go hand in hand. We argue that the Government have failed on both counts, and that is why even the financial services industry needs a Labour Government.

11.27 pm

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) says that the thrust of the proposals in the regulations is to help large investors and not small. I do not think that she can have read the proposals, because the regulations are full of protection for the small investor. As I itemised before and after the 7 o'clock bar on our proceedings, a number of the regulations have been designed with exactly that point in mind.

The hon. Lady should remember that, if the small shareholder wishes to keep his or her shareholding under the new TAURUS system through the company account rather than through a commercial controller, there will be no direct cost charged to him or her as a separate shareholder; it will be handled in the normal way, as at the moment, as a cost on the company generally. So I do not understand her point that it will be costly and burdensome to small shareholders, whose position is protected by the existence of the company account. They will go to the commercial account system only if it offers them a service that they wish to purchase at a sensible price.

The hon. Lady then said that she does not think that the regulatory regime here is tough enough. She does not feel that so strongly, I think, that she wants to vote against the regulations tonight, and I think that she conceded towards the end that the combination of this regulatory framework and a suitable rule book will do the job. Of course it will, because the regulations make it clear that the Secretary of State must satisfy himself before allowing the TAURUS operator to go ahead, and there will be a full, independent inspection of the system before the Secretary of State grants the authority to the operator to go ahead under these clear regulations.

Finally, the hon. Lady said that she did not think that the compensation scheme was adequate or properly structured. The sum is as large as I ever imagined it would be during our negotiations to get satisfactory compensation for individuals. The hon. Lady seems to forget that the compensation scheme is intended for private investors.

[Mr. Redwood]

The level of cover—£250,000 for a single error or problem in a private investor's account—is more than adequate to the task. I should have thought that that sum would cover most investments made by most people—even members of the Labour party. The intention is to cover the private investor. Professionals look after themselves in other ways—through business checks and controls and by recourse to the law if things go wrong; £250,000 is a lot of money.

The hon. Lady made a number of procrastinatory remarks about delays. I do not recognise the story that she told. I established a full consultation exercise on TAURUS when I had from the stock exchange an idea of what it wanted. We wanted to consult widely—that included consulting the hon. Lady and the Labour party—because that is the fair way in which to do these things. I then brought the regulations to the House with expedition. There was no lack of initiative on the part of the Department of Trade and Industry. It is now over to the stock exchange to develop the system.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Uncertified Securities Regulations 1992, which were laid before this House on 19th December, be approved.

Unemployment (Pontefract and Castleford)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. John M. Taylor.]*

11.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I am grateful for the opportunity to describe the problems of unemployment in my constituency and in neighbouring constituencies.

In December 1991, the official unemployment figures for the Castleford and Pontefract travel-to-work area were 10 per cent. of the total work force and 13 per cent. of the male work force. Recent announcements of job losses in the mining industry in my constituency and in neighbouring constituencies—at the Prince of Wales, Sharlston and Kellingley collieries and the Whitemoor colliery at Selby—will mean that 11·7 per cent. of the total work force and 15·7 per cent. of the male work force will be unemployed, the increases being 17 per cent. and 21 per cent. respectively. In December 1991, 8·7 per cent. of the total work force and 11·9 per cent. of the male work force in west Yorkshire were unemployed. Thus the unemployment rate in the area to which I am referring far exceeds both the rate for west Yorkshire and the national rate.

Since 1981, 17 collieries have closed, with the loss of 14,640 jobs. If one adds to that the 920 job losses announced last week in my area, the total number of jobs lost is 15,560—90 per cent. of Wakefield metropolitan district council's mining work force in 1981. Again, if one adds the jobs lost in spin-off industry, the job losses in the area total 20,000. Moreover, only yesterday, National Power announced that there would be hundreds of job losses at the Eggborough and Drax power stations.

The average age of the miners who have lost their jobs at the collieries to which I referred is 33. Some 95 per cent. of the Sharlston and Prince of Wales miners live in the Wakefield metropolitan district council area, as do 90 per cent. of the Kellingley miners and 60 per cent. of the Whitemoor miners. A total of 1,035 of the latest redundancies will affect people living in the area.

We must also take into account the closure of the Allerton Bywater colliery in March, with some 600 people—many of them also residing in the area—losing their jobs. The House and the Minister will appreciate the great problems that we are experiencing in my area and in other mining communities.

The collieries to which I refer are not unsuccessful collieries. For instance, as I understand it, those collieries can produce coal at about £38 per tonne, which compares well with the recently announced £68 per tonne reference price band for the European Community. The House can well appreciate how those miners will be feeling, given their efforts since 1985. Only a few weeks ago, some of them were breaking national output records, but this is the reward that they are now getting.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I am grateful for the opportunity to intervene at this point. My hon. Friend will be aware that in July last year, when the chairman of British Coal presented his report, he said that British Coal had made 79 per cent. profit on the operational account and had broken records because of the dedication and the will of the men who worked in the industry. What a poor reward it is for people who have given devoted service to

be told only a few months later that they are to be made redundant. The travel-to-work area to which my hon. Friend referred covers a part of my constituency. I put it to the Minister that there is a great deal of concern, and the way in which British Coal has treated its work force in this recent announcement of redundancies is shameful.

Mr. Lofthouse: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I fully appreciate the points that he has made. His constituency is affected by the recent announcements.

Over the past year, production levels have been as follows: Sharlston, 1 million tonnes; Kellingley, 2·1 million tonnes; Prince of Wales, 1·35 million tonnes; and Whitemoor, 1·36 million tonnes. Two of those pits have made good profits over the past year. Two have not done so well, but both are in development phases, preparing for production that will make profits.

The colliery closures have had spin-off effects in the mining engineering industry, with which I know my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) is familiar. He has been doing a lot of work recently to assist that industry, which is mainly based in his constituency.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's reference to the mining engineering industry and I commend him on his efforts over many years on behalf of the coal industry in general. He is aware, I know, that last year the Wultex factory in Wakefield closed down, with the loss of 60 jobs. In the last week or two, we have lost 100 jobs at Gullick Dobson in Wakefield. Is it not absolute nonsense that in this situation, with the loss not only of 15,000 mining jobs but of an additional 5,000 jobs in industries affected by the coal industry, we do not get one scrap of assistance from the British Government to regenerate the economy in Wakefield? The only help we get from the European Community is blocked by the British Government, who refuse to allow us that assistance. Is that not absolute nonsense?

Mr. Lofthouse: My hon. Friend is right. At the beginning of the 1980s, the mining engineering industry was a very healthy industry in the area. Local firms were performing well and were innovators and they provided good-quality training. In 1981, 1,651 people were employed in the local industry. A large proportion of the work force were very highly skilled engineers.

As the mining industry has been run down, there has been parallel picture in the mining engineering industry. Between 1981 and 1987, the local mining engineering industry was cut back slightly, to 1,532 employees. With the acceleration in the colliery closure programme from 1985 onwards, the markets of the mining engineering industry have been massively reduced. Between 1987 and 1989, there were more than 400 job losses, reducing the local work force to 1,121 in 1989. Since 1989, the local work force has been halved, leaving only 577 employees in the industry in January 1992. Another 95 job losses in the next weeks have been announced. If they go ahead, the industry will have declined by 1,169 men, or 70·8 per cent. of the work force, since 1981. In the four years since the 1987 census of employment, the industry will have lost 1,050 men, or 68·5 per cent. of its work force.

I appreciate that the Minister is not responsible for National Power and PowerGen, but they seem to have got around the table in a cosy arrangement with British Coal to fix the coal contracts after 1993. They are going through the exercise of negotiation but, according to the *International Coal Report* of 13 January, they have already agreed the tonnage that they will take from British Coal after 1993. It will be about 40 million tonnes, including opencast. That means that there will be 25 million tonnes of deep-mined coal.

There are also rumours that, because the commercial director of British Coal did not agree with that cosy little arrangement, he has got the sack. There is evidence of that. If the information about the tonnages is right, it means that the mining industry will be run down to about the size suggested in the Rothschild report. That could mean the loss of 30,000 to 40,000 more jobs in the industry between 1993 and 1995. It would mean that there would be no further competition in the electricity industry, as was foreseen at the time of the privatisation legislation. If British Coal is run down to the level needed to meet the demands of National Power and PowerGen, new players in the field could not purchase coal in this country. If gas is used for new or replacement capacity, the evidence is that it will be much dearer than coal.

If that is the case, newcomers would be in breach of the licences given on the privatisation of electricity. They would even be in difficulty in trying to import coal, because National Power and PowerGen have now got control of the ports at Immingham and are interested in Liverpool, so they are tying up that avenue, too. Therefore, there will be no competition in the supply of electricity. What is happening with British Coal, PowerGen and National Power is creating unemployment in mining communities such as mine.

My main point, which I have made many times in the House over the years, is that the Government have organised the rundown of the mining industry. For many years, they have had a duty to create replacement jobs in those communities but they have never done that in the areas to which I am referring.

The allocation of RECHAR to West Yorkshire totals £10·5 million, consisting of £8,568,000 from the European regional development fund and £1,792,000 from the European social fund. The Minister and his colleagues are witholding the RECHAR programme because of the Government's position on additionality. If that was not the case, projects ready for implementation within the Wakefield metropolitan district council area, which includes Pontefract and Castleford, would provide the following jobs: 600 in environmental improvements, 800 in the social and economic infrastructure, 550 in factory units and premises, 300 in tourism and 500 in small firms measures. Therefore, a total of 2,750 jobs could be got off the ground immediately in Wakefield alone if the Government would release the RECHAR programme.

I recognise that if RECHAR is released, Wakefield metropolitan district council's capital programme is so small that it would be unable to maximise the ERDF claim. But I strongly press the Minister to release RECHAR in view of the amount of the European social fund which is revenue-additional. At present, Wakefield could claim £622,000 for the 1990 and 1991 tranches, having incurred that expenditure to date. It could claim a further £1 million for 1992-93. All that money could be spent in the next two years on training redundant mineworkers and others in the power industry.

In those circumstances, and given that the Pontefract and Castleford area within the WMDC has received no Government assistance since the rapid rundown of the coal industry, I implore the Minister to release the

[Mr. Lofthouse]

RECHAR money to save mining communities such as my constituency from devastation and to provide employment for young redundant mine workers, who have achieved record-breaking production since 1985, only to be rewarded with the loss of their jobs. I hope that the Minister will take the advice in several of the Energy Select Committee's reports, where it has recognised the problems of the mining communities and advised the Government to support them. So far, that advice has been ignored.

Only the other day, a press statement was attributed to Commissioner Millan, saying that he was considering further money for areas like mine after the announcement of those job losses. There has been a further announcement that this country could lose up to £900 million if the Government do not change their attitude. Surely no Minister would want those young miners, who are thrown on the scrap heap as a result of Government, British Coal and PowerGen policy, to face a future with no employment at all, when money is available to provide jobs for many of them.

Any Government, whatever their political label, who do not decide to relieve that problem when they have the power to do so are failing in their duty. They have an obligation to mining communities. Miners have worked hard to produce the cheapest coal in Europe but they are now being thrown out of work. Selby miners in particular have been transferred from pit to pit and they have taken out high mortgages to buy lovely houses, to which they are entitled. They are now worried stiff.

I hope that the Minister will have some news for us tonight, and say that the Government may change their minds over the RECHAR programme, as the Secretary of State for the Environment suggests.

11.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) on having obtained this Adjournment debate. The House and I fully understand the concern which he has described in his constituency, and which his hon. Friends have described in neighbouring constituencies, at the recent developments that have taken place. I do not want to involve myself—it is not my place to do so—in the energy policy elements that he has understandably raised. I shall confine my remarks to his points about employment and what can be and is being done to alleviate the problems that he outlined.

May I put in context the figures that the hon. Gentleman gave at the outset of his speech? He mentioned the Pontefract and Castleford travel-to-work area. It is worth reflecting on the fact that in June 1983, nearly 7,000 people were out of work in that area and that by June 1987, the figure was 8,347. The last available figure that the hon. Gentleman quoted was 5,632. Although that figure is still unacceptably high, as such unemployment figures would be in any part of the country, it shows that progress has been made, even against the background that the hon. Gentleman described. That figure suggests that progress has been made.

The hon. Gentleman concentrated on the fact that further recent job losses have been announced at the Kellingly, Prince of Wales and other Yorkshire collieries. I appreciate that those losses are severe and why the hon. Gentleman has argued against those job cuts. However, I must remind the House that such matters are for British Coal to judge as an employer. It must make its best judgment about the commercial pressures and the jobs that it is to sustain. It must make a decision about the manpower requirements needed to produce the required tonnage to sell in competition with other fuels. I do not believe that the Government should seek to intervene directly in that process.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Surely the Government have already intervened by actively supporting the Immingham port legislation, which will enable coal to be imported up the Humber. That direct Government intervention has undermined the Yorkshire coalfield in Pontefract, Castleford and my constituency.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is correct in the sense that it is for the Government of the day to determine the broad framework of energy policy. Coal, in conjunction with other fuels, fits into that framework. It is for those responsible for providing energy to the country to make the decisions about which fuels are the most appropriate. British Coal operates within that framework and it must draw its own conclusions about what level of employment is sustainable in different mining communities.

This debate is about the outcome of that series of policy decisions. I do not shrink from that and, in that sense, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) is correct to say that the Government have some direct input. I appreciate the personal and family problems that are caused when individuals lose their jobs. However, with the continuing provision of the coal restructuring grant and other policies, redundant employees are still offered generous severance terms according to any measure.

British Coal announced recently that the age-related supplementary lump sum payments will terminate on 31 March 1992, after being in operation for more than two years. When British Coal announced that scheme in 1990, it said that its continued availability would be subject to review at an appropriate date. Whether any future scheme is introduced to replace those payments is a matter for British Coal and outside my responsibility. However, I understand that payments made under the scheme will be available to miners at the pits in the area mentioned by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford where job losses have recently been announced, provided that miners apply before 31 March. I hope that those payments will ensure that the level of provision remains equal to that made in the past two years at least.

Mr. Lofthouse: I appreciate that this is not a matter for the Minister's Department, but he has not got the real picture. Some of the young men aged between 30 and 38 will end up with a payment of £18,000—equivalent to about a year and a half's salary. However, those men have no hope of any other job and they have a large mortgage around their necks. They believe that they have no future. That is their reward for achieving record production levels since 1985.

Mr. Forth: I can understand that reaction as an immediate response to what has happened, but that is not the full story. I do not know whether time will permit me

to mention all the schemes that are available through my Department, the Employment Service and the training and enterprise councils.

Many agencies can help people who have had the misfortune to lose their jobs to identify their strengths and weaknesses, or their skill requirements. They can help to identify the way in which those people can either find other work or set themselves up in self-employment. Many other miners who have lost their jobs have subsequently become self-employed. They will use the severance payments to seek other employment or self-employment. These possibilities exist. It is the responsibility of the dedicated people in the Employment Service—those working in the TECs—to seek to help people who have lost their jobs in mining to find alternative employment.

I hope that Opposition Members will help by looking at the positive opportunities that exist for re-employment or self-employment for those of all ages who have received redundancy payments and who have skills, energy and vigour still to offer. That is a better approach than claiming that people who have lost their jobs in mining are in some way—I think the phrase was used this evening—on the scrap heap or forgotten. Nothing could be further from the truth. Despite the concern expressed by Opposition Members this evening, putting the matter in such a negative light does not help these people. Government Departments try in these difficult circumstances to come up with policies that help.

Grants and money are important, but equally important is identifying more positive employment alternatives.

It is worth noting that during British Coal's major restructuring there has not been a single compulsory redundancy. That goes for job losses in the pits in the Selby coalfield——

Mr. O'Brien: The men at the Selby coalfield were told that, if they did not let the management know by the Sunday night whether they would take redundancy, they would receive no redundancy payments. If that is not compulsory, what is?

Mr. Forth: I am not in a position to comment on that, but the hon. Gentleman may want to pursue the matter to establish whether reasonable alternatives have been offered. But within the strict definition of compulsory redundancy, what I said remains true.

Those who choose redundancy will continue to be provided with specialist counselling and positive assistance in obtaining jobs by British Coal Enterprise, the body established expressly to help redundant miners and their communities. As hon. Members know, the Department of Energy has made over £60 million available to British Coal Enterprise, which has enabled it to create more than 75,000 opportunities for work nationwide. Over 80 per cent. of those registering at job shops set up by British Coal Enterprise at collieries which have closed have found employment. That reinforces my positive message of a moment ago.

As Opposition Members probably know, British Coal Enterprise has such a job shop at Allerton Bywater colliery; and I understand that it will now be setting up job shops at Sharlston, Kellingley and Prince of Wales collieries. These are all positive steps being taken by British Coal Enterprise to meet the challenge outlined by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford.

Opposition Members may want me to comment briefly on RECHAR. The allegation, repeated tonight, that the British Government are withholding the money is a travesty of the truth. It is Commissioner Millan who is withholding the money——

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forth: I will not. I have only two minutes left.

Mr. Enright: The Minister is afraid to give way.

Mr. Forth: I am trying to comment on a point that hon. Members have asked me about.

It is the Commissioner who has said that he is withholding the money, or who has threatened to withhold it because he claims that there is some sort of difficulty over the British Government's use of the money. That is not true. The Government continue to pursue policies in this matter which they have pursued for some time. The British Government want these programmes to be used in a positive way to help the areas for which they are designed. It does not help the communities involved when a former Labour Secretary of State comes up with such arguments——

Mr. Enright: Give way!

Mr. Forth: It is unhelpful of the Commissioner to come up with arguments that prevent the release of funds to help the very communities that the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford has mentioned. I hope that we can all move forward, as the Government hope to do, together with the commissioner, to identify whatever difficulties may exist and to work out ways of using the money in the ways for which it was intended——

Mr. Lofthouse: If the Government have their way and the money is paid to central Government, will the Minister guarantee that the money will come to Pontefract and Castleford and areas like it?

Mr. Forth: Provided that good will prevails on all sides and the matter is dealt with sensibly and practically, there is no doubt that the funds designed to help these areas will be directed towards them. No one wishes otherwise. The Government and the Commissioner must continue to try to identify any difficulties. Certainly, the Commissioner has admitted from time to time that he has similar difficulties with the definition of additionality even in other member states. The problem has arisen and continues to arise from time to time in various member states of the Community.

I hope that Opposition Members understand the Government's wish to adopt a positive attitude to the problems rightly brought to our attention by the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford this evening. I hope that he will accept my comments in that positive and helpful light.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 29 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER (GIROBANK) BILL

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL

EAST COAST MAIN LINE (SAFETY) BILL
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time tomorrow.

GREATER NOTTINGHAM LIGHT RAPID TRANSIT BILL
Read a Second time, and referred to the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills.

LEEDS SUPERTRAM BILL
Read a Second time, and committed.

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL

LONDON UNDERGROUND (JUBILEE) BILL
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time tomorrow.

MIDLAND METRO (NO. 3) BILL
Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Ravenscraig

1. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further action he intends to take in connection with the announced closure of Ravenscraig.

13. **Mr. Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will itemise the assistance offered to north Lanarkshire since June 1991.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): We have already taken action to strengthen and diversify the Lanarkshire economy. I have announced very substantial additional resources, through Scottish Enterprise, for the Lanarkshire development agency. Those resources are being deployed on a wide range of infrastructure projects, major environmental works and training and business development schemes, following the recommendations of the Lanarkshire working group. I have also announced that, subject to the agreement of the European Commission, the Government intend to set up an enterprise zone in north Lanarkshire.

Dr. Reid: It was obvious from that answer that the Secretary of State has nothing whatsoever to say about steel. Is he aware that next week my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) will visit the United States to look at the latest technological developments in steel production—thin slab casting? Is the Secretary of State aware that we welcome the fact—however small the step may be—that, with the approval of the Scottish Office, representatives of Scottish Enterprise will accompany my hon. Friend? Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that we need much more than that? We need a public commitment today from the Government that they will be prepared to give technical and financial assistance to any buyer that wished to develop thin slab technology at Ravenscraig. The Labour party has already given that pledge on behalf of a future Labour Government. Will the right hon. Gentleman publicly give that pledge?

Mr. Lang: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Scottish Enterprise has already investigated thin slab casting in the United States of America. It would be naive of any Opposition Member to think that British Steel had not carefully considered the possibilities of that type of development, which requires a plentiful scrap supply and low energy costs. I am quite sure that British Steel will have considered that and will weigh it up as well as any other possible developments. British Steel must decide whether it is a sensible project on which to embark.

Mr. Robertson: I warn the Secretary of State for Scotland that, when it comes to the urgent task of providing resources for the regeneration of the Lanarkshire economy, he will not be able to hide behind the arrogant and imperious people who run British Steel. During the last couple of months that he holds that office, he will be judged harshly on what he does.

Will the right hon. Gentleman stop juggling and manipulating figures and pretending that large-scale

assistance has already been given to Lanarkshire? Will he exclude hospitals and existing road-building programmes from the calculations? Will he turn his mind to the serious short-term problems: first, the problem that will be caused for the existing development project by the delayed decision on an enterprise zone and, secondly, the problem that the Lanarkshire development agency and Scottish Enterprise will have because of the Government's obsession with annuality in the money that they give. If the right hon. Gentleman turned his mind to those problems, that would be a constructive contribution.

Mr. Lang: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman does not think that there is a vast amount of economic development going on in Lanarkshire as a result of Government initiatives. It is time that he visited his constituency and had a look around. No fewer than 13 of the 16 sites identified by the Lanarkshire working group for development as locations for new industrial activity are already being developed as a result of the extra resources and the extra commitment of the Government. We are determined to help Lanarkshire to diversify to attract new jobs all the time.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. Friend agree that general anger was expressed in the House last week at British Steel's decision to close Ravenscraig? I welcome the many offers of support and the money available to various agencies in Scotland, as well as the fact that it is hoped to establish an enterprise zone in Lanarkshire. Will my right hon. Friend consider appointing a supremo to co-ordinate all those opportunities, to bring new jobs as quickly as possible to Scotland later this year?

Mr. Lang: As my hon. Friend knows, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland with responsibility for industry—my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)—has co-ordinated the work of the Lanarkshire working group, which has brought together many local authorities, public bodies and private sector bodies. They produced an extremely effective report, which identified a large number of projects which could usefully be established to help Lanarkshire. Some 60 of those projects have now been implemented. Lanarkshire development agency now fulfils the co-ordinating role to which my hon. Friend referred. Of course, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is keeping in close contact with the agency, as is Scottish Enterprise.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: What action has the Secretary of State taken to find a buyer for Ravenscraig? What assurances can be given about the future of Hunterston? Its existing responsibilities are somewhat in doubt, but it should be remembered that it will be a crucial strategic site for the steel industry of the next century. What action has been taken to ensure its survival?

Mr. Lang: As for the possible sale of Ravenscraig, the chairman of British Steel has confirmed that the provision contained in the prospectus with regard to disposal has been triggered. I have commissioned a report on the long-term implications of the economic potential of the Hunterston site. It is an important one which we would not want to see wasted.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend will be aware that concern has been expressed throughout the country about the closure of Ravenscraig. Is he also aware that the regional development aid available to Lanarkshire and the rest of Scotland is equivalent to £28.40 per head compared with £5·55 per head in England? That demonstrates the Government's commitment to redevelop and improve Scottish industry and commerce.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government do identify need and direct resources towards it. Those needs in Scotland have been clearly identified and are fully met from the United Kingdom Exchequer. It may be that because of the Government's sustained commitment unemployment fell in the past four years by almost 9,000 in the Lanarkshire travel-to-work area.

Dr. Bray: Is the Secretary of State aware that his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) shows that he does not understand the proposal for the new technology at Ravenscraig? It is not a proposal for an electric arc furnace, which would lead to scrap and high energy costs, but a proposal to put the new technology on at the end of the BOS—basic oxygen steel—route. Is the right hon Gentleman further aware that practical questions about the continued use of the plant, reclamation and redevelopment must be settled by September? In particular, is the right hon. Gentleman clear that a new operator would have to be indemnified well before September against reclamation costs, which fall to be settled between the Government and British Steel?

Mr. Lang: On the question of possible contamination at the British Steel site, I have already asked Sir Robert Scholey to contribute in terms of resources and making the site available for visits so that the extent of contamination can be properly examined. The legislative position is much the same as it has been in past decades. No local authority planning requirements were imposed at the time of the planning consent. We wish to ensure that the site is restored to such a level, as has happened at all other British Steel sites, that it can be used for further industry.

Ferranti Dalkeith

2. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what notification he received about the contraction of the work force in Ferranti Dalkeith; and what was his response.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): My right hon. Friend received no notification of the recent job losses in Ferranti Dalkeith.

Mr. Eadie: I am sure that the Minister agrees that the proposal to shed to two thirds of the work force in Ferranti Dalkeith is a severe blow to the 146 employees involved. It is all the more deplorable when one considers that it is high-tech industry with a very skilled work force whom we should wish to retain in the economy. Midlothian has lost far too many jobs through closures and contractions. I understand—the Minister may correct me if I am wrong—that an arrangement has been made for him to meet the firm next Monday. If that is true, I welcome the initiative. What hope will the Minister give to the work force in Dalkeith and Midlothian as a result of that initiative?

Mr. Stewart: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about the difficulties that the firm faces. It has attributed its problems to the International Signal and Control fraud

case and world trading conditions. On Monday I shall not meet the company but I shall meet representatives of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to join the meeting, he will be welcome. It will take place in Alhambra house, Glasgow, on Monday at 8.30 am.

Ravenscraig

3. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has received the permission of the European Commission to establish an enterprise zone in the Ravenscraig area of Lanarkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Government gave formal notification, on 23 January, to the European Commission of our intention to create an enterprise zone for north Lanarkshire. We have stressed the importance of that proposal and must now await the Commission's agreement, which I hope will be forthcoming.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the Government reacted swiftly and precisely to the tragedy of Ravenscraig and, as they want to proceed right away with their plans, which might involve 17,000 extra jobs and £50 million expenditure, is not it an insult to Scotland that Commissioner Millan, who knows all the facts, has not been prepared to give his approval and appears likely to wait for several months before doing so? As that is the same Commissioner who is damaging districts throughout Britain by withholding hundreds of millions of pounds of necessary aid for which our taxpayers have paid at least twice, will my right hon. Friend urge Commissioner Millan to cut the red tape and for once do something to help Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety about the apparent reluctance of Commissioner Millan to release to the United Kingdom funds that should come to us to help areas of particular deprivation where we have indentified need. As for Lanarkshire and the problems of the steel industry, only three wards in Motherwell would be eligible for RECHAR resources. Nevertheless, that would be useful. I am sure that Commissioner Brittan will consider the issue of the enterprise zone application promptly and, I hope, in a fair-minded and effective way.

Mr. McMaster: Is not the Secretary of State ashamed of the fact that the Conservatives have committed industrial genocide against Scotland since they have been in office? The closures affect not only Ravenscraig and Lanarkshire but have a domino effect in constituencies such as mine where, on the admission of the Minister with responsibility for Scottish industry—the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)—76 per cent. of manufacturing jobs disappeared between 1979 and 1989 and a further 3,600 have been lost since. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that urgent action is needed, not only to save jobs but to create them, or does he agree with the Prime Minister who, in a pathetic and complacent reply to me recently, said that he did not believe that economic initiatives were necessary?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is giving a selective exposition of the facts. For example, he seems to be overlooking the fact that unemployment fell in Lanarkshire during the four years to November 1991 by almost 9,000. Unemployment has fallen throughout Scotland in four of the past five years. Employment has risen by substantial amounts and company registrations have increased dramatically. The Scottish economy is stronger and broader based than it has been for some time.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the option of an enterprise zone would not be available to an independent Scotland if Spain vetoed Scotland's part in Europe?

Mr. Lang: I have not speculated on such extreme developments because I do not think that anyone in the United Kingdom, least of all in Scotland, could contemplate such dire consequences for Scotland.

Scottish Steel Industry

4. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the chairman of British Steel to discuss the future of the Dalzell plant and other Scottish steel plants.

Mr. Lang: I met the chairman of British Steel on 6 January to discuss matters connected with the Scottish steel plants. Since then, I have written to him on a number of detailed points. I would expect to meet the chairman of British Steel again whenever appropriate.

Mr. Sillars: Will the Secretary of State take today's opinion poll to show to Bob Scholey and explain to him that when that is translated into a vote for independence, as it will be at the coming general election, we shall no longer have to write to him, bend the knee or go cap in hand asking for things for Scotland? Instead, all the power that we require will be in our hands and, as an independent country, we shall be able to build on the Dalzell option, save the Scottish steel industry and then expand it.

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman thinks that his plans for saving the Scottish steel industry are the sort that, when translated into economic policy for an independent Scotland, will benefit that country, he must be living on the moon. His proposals are totally unrealistic. He is living in a fantasy world and it is time that he came to terms with reality.

Mr. Hood: It would be helpful if the Secretary of State met the Scottish National party shop stewards at Dalzell and explained to them that the lies being told by the SNP leadership will not help to save jobs but will threaten jobs. When the Secretary of State meets the shop stewards, will he also remind them that the fantasy figure of the 1 million tonne production which is supposed to come from the new scheme will not be taken up by the markets? Only 71,000 tonnes of slate steel produced was used in the North sea last year, so there is no market for the scheme. Perhaps the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) has negotiated a 1 million tonne export contract with the Chinese in Hong Kong—that is the sort of fantasy that the SNP is talking about.

Mr. Lang: I shall refrain from intervening in the internecine strife between the trade unions at Ravenscraig and those at Dalzell, as I regard that subject as the province of the Labour party. In terms of economic development, my responsibility is to look to the future and to help Lanarkshire develop new employment in industries

to create new prosperity for that region and Scotland. It is to that end that all our plans are directed, and they are beginning to yield results.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Secretary of State still believe, as the Labour party does, that there is a strong case for investing in Dalzell and challenging the single plate mill strategy of British Steel. If so, what steps is he taking? Does he realise that Scotland cannot afford a Government who are determined to do nothing or a nationalist party that offers false hope to the steel industry on the basis of what one independent commentator in the *Glasgow Herald* today described as

"a meaningless, misleading bunch of wrongly used statistics"?

Mr. Lang: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was well aware that we have consistently supported the case for the Dalzell plate mill. We submitted a closely argued paper to British Rail a considerable time ago and I raised the matter with Robert Scholey when I last met him. I hope that the mill will survive for a long time. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and I have had a number of meetings with trade union leaders during the past year or two and my hon. Friend remains willing to meet them again at their request.

NHS Expenditure

5. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the proposed expenditure on the national health service for 1992-93; and what was the level of expenditure in 1978-79.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Next year we will spend £3,725 million on the national health service in Scotland. That compares with £893 million in the last year of the Labour Government. That represents an increase of four times in cash terms and one and a half times above inflation.

Sir Hector Monro: Does not that massive increase in expenditure, accompanied by the great improvement in health care nail Opposition outbursts about cuts in the national health service? How much would it cost to give free eye and dental treatment in Scotland, as promised by the Labour party?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the huge increase in resources. The increased expenditure on the national health service in Scotland amounts to more than the entire receipts that the Government obtain from North sea oil in any one year and represents a huge increase in resources. It is true that the cost of eye tests and dental check-ups, the abolition of competitive tendering and the introduction of a minimum wage would add £125 million to the cost of the national health service in Scotland. The Labour party, which makes those proposals has not promised one single extra cent for the national health service to compensate for the cost of those policies.

Mr. Ernie Ross: The Minister will recall that when Scottish questions were last before the House I asked the last question on health matters and referred to the accident and emergency service at Ninewells hospital. We were slightly overtaken by subsequent events—I refer to the heat that was generated while we were waiting for an announcement. The Minister gave what I thought was a reasonable reply, but perhaps he was influenced by the pressure that was on him. Has he had time to consider the request for funds to relocate the accident and emergency unit at the Dundee royal infirmary site to the Ninewells site? Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he has received a request from Tayside health board about the relocation, and does he propose to accede to the request?

Mr. Forsyth: I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman felt that he did not receive an entirely satisfactory answer because I was under pressure. I am never under pressure when it comes to the health service in Scotland because it is delivering a splendid result for the people of Scotland. The pattern of provision of service in a health board is a matter for that board. I am sure that the chairman of Tayside health board will be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the proposals.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Will the Minister use some of the additional money about which he talked to expand the audiology service in Scotland? In a written answer last year, he told me that figures were not held centrally on waiting lists for hearing assessments and hearing aids for children and adults, including pensioners. Accordingly, the Minister will not be aware that in some parts of Scotland, especially in my constituency, it is difficult to have hearing aids serviced and batteries supplied. Will the Minister give an undertaking that the audiology service in Scotland will be examined at Scottish Office level?

Mr. Forsyth: I am happy to give the hon. Lady that undertaking. As part of the patients charter proposals, I have been examining several services, including the supply of wheelchairs, that have involved real difficulties in some parts of Scotland. I shall be happy to examine the services that are provided for those who suffer from deafness to one degree or another. The hon. Lady will be aware of the introduction and expansion of cochlea implants in Scotland as a result of work that was undertaken in Ayrshire. That is a step forward. The hon. Lady is getting a brand new hospital in her constituency, which is a considerable expansion of service.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend tell the House how expenditure per capita on the health service in Scotland compares with that expenditure in England and Wales?

Mr. Forsyth: Expenditure on the health service in Scotland per capita is 23 per cent. more than in England —£730 per person in Scotland and £595 per person in England. It is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us the reason."] Opposition Members ask me why that is so. They should tell us how a Scottish Parliament would find the money to pay those bills.

Mr. Galbraith: The Minister gives us a false picture of what is happening in the health service. Did not waiting lists in Scotland increase by 4 per cent. last year? Is it not also the case that last year the number of nurses in Scotland was reduced by 500? Does the Minister accept that under the last Labour Government expenditure rose each year by more than 4 per cent. while under this Government it has fallen by 0·1 per cent? That is the reality. There have been cuts, cuts and more cuts, for which the Government will pay dearly at the next general election.

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman does a disservice to the 150,000 people who work in the health service, who

this year treated 1 million more patients than were being treated when the Labour Government left office. Record numbers of patients are being treated, there is a record number of staff in the health service and there is record investment in the health service. It does the health service no good when the hon. Gentleman makes cheap party points at its expense.

As I said, the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) has a new hospital in her constituency. There are new hospitals throughout Scotland. When we had a Labour Government, the health service building programme was cut for the first time in its history. That was the Labour Government's record. That happened because of the way in which they ran the economy, and not because they did not want to help the health service. If the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) had his way with a Scottish Parliament, cuts would return to the health service and people employed in it would lose their jobs.

Eastfield Rail Depot

6. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of ScotRail to discuss the planned closure of Eastfield railway depot.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The decision to close the Eastfield depot is an operational matter for British Rail. My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to meet ScotRail to discuss this.

Mr. Martin: The Minister will know that the Government, at Prime Minister level, gave a commitment that rail safety in this country would be improved, yet this closure decision will lead to 70 skilled railway maintenance workers being put on the dole. The Minister will also know that that means that heavy frieght repairs will have to go south of the border. May I ask the Minister to use his good offices to try to get ScotRail to change its mind and to save this important depot? I hope that at a later stage the Minister will also be able to provide a commitment as to what British Rail intends to do with that land.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman at this stage what will happen to the land. It is too early to say. The closure will lead to the loss of 120 jobs, but the hope is that there will be no compulsory redundancies and that many of the employees will be relocated at, for example, the depots at Motherwell, Ayr, Grangemouth and Inverness. The hon. Gentleman may be correct when he says that a proportion of the work for the heavier locomotives may go south of the border, but I hope that the bulk of it will stay in Scotland. The matter must be put into perspective. The decision to site a rail freight terminal at Mossend over the next 10 to 15 years is expected to lead to the creation of 8,000 jobs.

I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that safety must be given the highest priority. The high levels of investment in British Rail would not be possible without Government support through the obligation grant, which is about £600 million for the current year.

Labour Statistics

7. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest official count of *(a)* unemployed persons and *(b)* notified vacancies.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The number of unemployed people, seasonally adjusted, in Scotland in December 1991 was 227,300 and the number of notified vacancies at Scottish jobcentres was 21,200. Vacancies at jobcentres are thought, however, to represent only about one third of total vacancies in the economy at any one time.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister not realise that an unlucky 13 people are chasing every job notified? Does he not realise that in my Maryhill constituency alone, unemployment has risen during the last year by 450 to a total of more than 5,500, leading to an unemployment figure of 18 per cent? The last time I raised the issue at Scottish Question Time, the Secretary of State for Scotland replied that he did not believe that anything should be done, that the recession would finally work its way out and that market forces would provide the answer. If the Government believe in market forces, they will realise that their sell-by date is past. It is high time they realised that the dust is gathering on the wrappers and packed it up.

Mr. Stewart: Perhaps I may point out to the hon. Lady that unemployment is down 14 per cent. over the last three years and that long-term unemployment is down by 1,000 over the last three years in her Maryhill constituency. *[Interruption.]* The Opposition do not like hearing about unemployment coming down. As for turnover in the labour market, 378,400 people left the unemployment count in 1991 and 211,000 people got jobs through jobcentres in 1991. Those are the facts, even if Opposition Members do not like them.

Dr. Godman: Within the figures that the Minister has just related to the House are those concerning Greenock and Port Glasgow. I think that he will agree with me that the unemployment rate in my constituency is dismally and scandalously high. Were the west of Scotland headquarters of the Land Registry to be located at Cartsburn or the Gourock ropeworks in Port Glasgow, that would help, if only marginally, to reduce the disgracefully high unemployment figures in Greenock and Port Glasgow. When is this outfit going to play the game by my constituents?

Mr. Stewart: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman has made, which was, of course, made by a delegation led by him from Inverclyde district council; my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton) will have heard what he said. Generally, I accept that there is a serious problem in Inverclyde. We are working on improving access to some of the enterprise zone sites there. That is one of the priorities for the area.

Mr. Andy Stewart: If and when Scotland leaves the Union, that will cause further unnecessary unemployment. Will my hon. Friend confirm that Westminster-based jobs carried out in Scotland, such as jobs in the Inland Revenue at East Kilbride and Cumbernauld, will have to be repatriated to English constituencies?

Mr. Stewart *rose*—— [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I intend to answer. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that if Scotland were to leave the Union there would be substantial economic dislocation. I am sure that my hon. Friend and fellow clansman is also right to emphasise the real benefits for Scotland in remaining a full part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Worthington: In the past, on unemployment questions, the Minister has justified the level of unemployment by saying that the Government have created more jobs than ever before. The Secretary of State has used the expression "historically high". Despite the fact that he counts part-time jobs as full-time jobs and puts employment training places in the jobs column, will the Minister admit that by his own Department's figures there are now fewer jobs in Scotland than there were when the Government came to power in 1979? Let us not have the Government misleading the House. According to the Government's figures, there are now fewer jobs in Scotlnd than in 1979. Is that not correct—yes or no?

Mr. Stewart: That is a fairly typical contribution from the English academic who condescends to represent the working class of Clydebank. The hon. Gentleman has opposed every positive training measure put forward by the Government, and every Labour Government ended up with higher unemployment when they left office than when they took office.

Industrial Policy

8. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will next meet representatives of the Scottish CBI to discuss industrial policy and investment in west central Scotland.

Mr. Lang: My colleagues and I have continuing contacts with the Scottish CBI on matters affecting the economy, including that of west central Scotland. We hope to arrange a further meeting shortly.

Mr. Hogg: Has the Secretary of State seen the Scottish chambers business survey for the last quarter of 1991, which concluded that confidence had fallen back in all principal sectors, that demand remained stagnant and was contracting in all major sectors, that manufacturers' stocks were running out, that investment was contracting, and that the worst hit areas were central Scotland and Edinburgh? How does the Secretary of State intend to talk that up into a success story?

Mr. Lang: By selecting parts of the survey to suit his case, the hon. Gentleman seeks to talk down the economy of Scotland. Perhaps he should also consider what the CBI wants for the economy: it wants lower taxes which would encourage investment, but under Labour it would get not lower but higher taxes throughout the United Kingdom and there would be special higher taxes in Scotland under a Scottish assembly which would impose 3p on income tax.

Mr. Favell: Has my right hon. Friend discussed with the Scottish CBI all the talk about an independent Scotland? I am appalled that Opposition Members should contemplate it after all that the United Kingdom has gone through in the past 300 years. We founded the British Commonwealth together. This nation is one of the most admired in the world. Opposition Members say that they cannot make their voices heard here. What chance then would they have among the Italians, the Germans and the French? United we stand, divided we fall—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask questions of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend was absolutely right to identify the dangers to the Scottish economy either from separation or from the Labour party's policy to set up tax-raising assemblies. The outgoing president of Glasgow chamber of commerce said earlier this week:

"The concern of our members is that devolution would be bad for Scottish industry."

In the CBI's most recent survey on the matter, more than 90 per cent. identified the same danger to the Scottish economy.

Defence Spending

9. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress being made by Scottish Enterprise in relation to its examination of the impact on the Scottish economy of the decline in defence spending.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Within the defence industries initiative, Scottish Enterprise has received a draft impact assessment from its consultants. Information from that study will be used to take forward work already in hand with local enterprise companies and defence companies to identify practical steps to help companies and communities to adapt to the changing demand for defence-related goods and services.

Mr. Douglas: Notwithstanding that interesting reply and the orders that were given to Yarrow's last week for type 23 frigates, will the Minister concede that there is a serious problem in terms of the diminution of defence orders? That is especially aggravated in areas such as Fife and the west of Scotland. What funding will the Minister provide to ensure that the high technology skills embraced by companies such as Ferranti are not lost to Scotland? We need not a paper exercise, but actual funding to ensure that we keep those skills. The Government have that responsibility.

Mr. Stewart: I do not want to criticise the hon. Gentleman personally—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] It is, after all, a rather splendid day for anti-devolutionists. He puts forward a perfectly valid point of which Scottish Enterprise is fully aware. However, an independent Scotland would not get frigate orders for Yarrow's. Moreover, there would be no Rosyth dockyard and no Rosyth naval base.

Mr. Strang: Will the Minister accept that the defence industries initiative, which his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced last October, is utterly inadequate? It provides not a penny of new money towards research and development, investment or retraining. It is clear that the only way to make real progress is to elect a Labour Government and set up a defence diversification agency which will really tackle the problem and help our companies to expand into civil products.

Mr. Stewart: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will check with his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for

Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) to see whether there is any official Labour commitment for that amount of extra public expenditure, as I have never heard of one. I do not take the view that the problems of diversification from defence-related companies will be solved through state intervention. The initiative is right to assist the defence sector companies and subcontractors in commercial adjustments to new markets, to provide support—with other agencies and local authorities—to communities that may be heavily affected, and to support reskilling and retraining needs. That is a sensible and constructive approach. If the Labour party is making any massive public expenditure commitments for a different one, let us hear them.

Industrial Policy

10. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a statement on industrial policy for Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The central aim of the Government's industrial policy, in Scotland as in the rest of the United Kingdom is to create the conditions for sustainable growth in the economy.

I have today written to my hon. Friend elaborating on how my Department promotes that central aim. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library of the House and published in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my right hon. Friend remind Opposition Members that under the old hands-on, interventionist industrial policy that the Labour party is supposed to support, British Steel lost £15 billion and our steel trade was in massive deficit, whereas now British Steel is the most efficient in Europe and we run a healthy surplus on our steel trade? Does he agree that there is something spurious and deceitful about a party that criticises the Government's hands-off policy on steel and calls for a return to interventionism, but does not have the guts to commit itself to keep Ravenscraig open if Labour came to power?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to identify the double thinking of the Labour party. It is significant that last Thursday a motion was tabled in the name of the Leader of the Opposition calling on the Government to use every possible means to intervene in the Scottish steel industry, while at the same time the Leader of the Opposition was quoted in *The Financial Times* as saying that

"it isn't intervention that the steel industry needs".

I do not think that the Labour party has any idea what any of its policies add up to.

Mr. McAllion: Does the Secretary of State accept that the success or lack of success of his industrial policy will determine the level of mass unemployment in Scotland? Does he also accept that the only circumstances in which unemployment will be a "price worth paying" in Scotland is when it is paid in full by the Scottish Office Front Bench? Why do the right hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends not do Scotland a favour, pack their collective bags and go now?

Mr. Lang: The Conservative party needs no lessons from the Labour party about employment and unemployment. Every Labour Government increased unemployment. In four of the past five years unemployment has fallen, and it will fall further when the economy is moving, when investment is rising and when there is increased prosperity. All those things will be achieved by the Government's policies—they would never be achieved by the high taxation policies of the Labour party.

Following is the information

The central aim of the Government's Industrial policy is to create the conditions for sustainable growth in the economy.

The Government believes that since it is the private sector which creates wealth, the Government must seek to create the environment in which companies are encouraged to establish, develop and expand, in order to create both wealth and employment. Good public services and living standards can be provided and maintained only in tandem with entreproneurial activity.

Central to the creation of such an environment is the rigorous control of inflation. The Government's policies have resulted in the United Kingdom having inflation below that of the European Community average. Independent forecasters expect falls in the underlying rate of inflation in the months to come.

The success of these policies, and of the work of my Department, can be shown through the progress Scotland has seen over the past 10 years.

During the 1980s Scottish manufacturing productivity by an average 5·2 per cent. per annum, contrasting with a mere 2·0 per cent. in the 1970s and 4·1 per cent. in the 1900s. In this respect, Scotland's performance in the 1980s was stronger than any of the leading 7 OECD economies.

Since 1981, Locate in Scotland has recorded planned inward investment by companies totalling £4·2 billion, associated with the intended creation or safeguarding of some 80,000 jobs. Even after appropriate discounting of total company forecasts of prospective employment, to around two-thirds of the initially planned figures, this is a record to proud of. It shows that inward investing companies see our economy as providing an environment in which they can operate successfully. Exports of manufactured goods from Scotland have also been buoyant, with an increase of 26 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Company and VAT registrations and the numbers of self-employed in Scotland have all increased substantially since 1979. The number of companies registered in Scotland rose by almost 70 per cent. from 1980 to 1991, while the number of VAT registered companies rose by 23 per cent. despite the significant real terms in the registration threshold.

Self-employment in Scotland stands at a historically high level, having increased by almost 50 per cent. between 1979 and 1990 compared with no growth over the previous 3 decades.

The privatisation of the two electricity companies in Scotland and of the Scottish Bus Group has led to greatly increased opportunities for employee-share ownership, and in the case of the electricity companies, to more individual shareholders in Scotland. Around half a million Scots applied for shares in the electricity companies and some 400,000 continue to hold their shares.

There have also been a number of encouraging trends in the more recent period, particularly in the Scottish

labour market. The Scottish civilian workforce in employment, for example, has seen a growth of 137,000 or 6·5 per cent. over the period June 1987 to June 1991.

In terms of unemployment, the seasonally adjusted total has fallen by over 98,000 in the 4¼ year period to December 1991, a fall of some 30 per cent. This has resulted in the differential between Scottish and United Kingdom unemployment rates falling from 3·1 percentage points to just 0·2 percentage points over the same period, the lowest such differential since the war.

Despite these major economic advances, Scotland has been affected by recessionary trends in the United Kingdom as a whole and in the rest of the world during 1990 and 1991. My aim is to minimise these effects, and those of necessary structural changes, and to make the Scottish economy more resilient to future economic downturns using the policy instruments outlined earlier. There are already clear indications from forecasters and official statistics that Scotland has outperformed the United Kingdom economy in each of the years since 1988.

The Government are committed to removing the excess rates burden on Scottish business as quickly as possible. Good progress has been made; non-domestic rates were reduced by £80 million in 1990-91 and a further £100 million in the current year. They will be further reduced by £60 million in 1992-93. These large reductions have encouraged investment and employment, particularly in the service sector which does not benefit from derating.

Another keynote of the Government's industrial policy has been the freeing of previously state-owned assets, allowing the more effective use of these resources under private sector management. This policy, which is increasingly being seen in countries throughout the world as essential to economic efficiency, has promoted efficiency and increased incentives as well as widening share ownership among the general public.

My Department works within Scotland to promote these aims and to foster the development of an environment in which business can flourish. It aims to enhance the role of private enterprise in the economy; to maximise the value added by industry and commerce in Scotland through the modernisation and expansion of competitive industrial and commercial activity; and to encourage a broad and diverse economic base. It promotes the vital links that exist between business and education, allowing each to understand better the needs of the other. Through its administration of regional support measures it assists the establishment of viable economic activity in less advantaged parts of Scotland. It promotes the progressive development of the roads and transport infrastructure and the maintenance and improvement of transport services; and it fosters general environmental and economic improvements, essentially through the recently established Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise and their associated networks of business-led local enterprise companies.

In promoting enterprise in Scotland my Department, either directly or through publicly funded bodies:—

—gives financial and advisory support for competitive firms, entrepreneurial activity, inward investment, the science and technology base, exporting and training;

—encourages deregulation where the burdens imposed on business outweigh the potential advantage to the public interest;

—seeks to identify gaps which the market is not able to address and seeks ways of filling those gaps;

—seeks to ensure that the markets in land and capital are meeting the needs of new or expanding enterprises;

—supports urban regeneration, development in remote areas and tourism;

—secures the building and maintenance of the trunk road network and allocates resources for local authority road and transport systems; and

—secures assistance to appropriate areas from European funds.

I will oversee continued development of the business environment in Scotland to ensure that the many major advances made in the 1980s and early 90s are continued in the future. In particular I will look to: the networks of local enterprise companies, together with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, to capitalise further on the integration of economic development and training which they uniquely enjoy; the promotion of Scotland's links with the rest of Europe; the development of Scottish Trade International to further boost export performance; and the further development of the economic climate which will best allow firms to develop, expand and meet the challenges set by the completion of the Single European Market.

School Boards

11. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of Scottish schools currently have school boards; what has been the total cost of school boards to date; and if he will make a statement about the future of school boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Around 75 per cent. of schools in Scotland have school boards.

The revenue support grant settlement for 1989-90 took into account the additional costs—estimated at £10 million per year—to be incurred by education authorities in introducing school boards. Education authorities budgeted to spend just over £6 million on school boards in 1991-92.

Mr. Bruce: Does the Minister now acknowledge that the school boards legislation that he imposed on Scotland against the clearly expressed views of the majority of parents has not been quite the success that he claimed? His figures today indicate that a quarter of schools in Scotland cannot even muster a school board, and the number is growing as parents become increasingly frustrated at the Government's failure to provide the resources needed in education. Does the Minister agree that the £10 million allocated to school boards would have been much better invested in books and teaching materials?

Mr. Forsyth: I published a survey of school boards today which shows that they have been remarkably successful—[HON. MEMBERS: "It would."]—an independent survey which shows that school boards have been remarkably successful. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has a cheek coming here and criticising me because a quarter of the schools have no school board. That is a matter for the schools themselves. Many of them are small. It was as a result of pressure from the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues that I accepted an amendment to the School Boards (Scotland) Bill 1987, changing our original proposal that schools with fewer than 100 pupils would not be eligible to have boards and enabling them to do so. The hon. Member for Gordon was among those who

lobbied that small schools should have the opportunity and that it was a matter for them if they did not want a board. Yet now he comes to the House and criticises the Government for the consequences of his own policy.

Mr. Bill Walker: In the rural areas, where people care very much about the education of their children and where the school boards are functioning extremely well, proposals have been put to me which suggest—this does not contradict what my hon. Friend said in his answer just now—that small country schools, particularly primary feeders, might be better looked after if they were part of the school board system of the secondary school into which they feed, so that the school board would supervise both the secondary school and the primary schools feeding into it. Might that not help the situation in the rural areas, and will my hon. Friend consider the idea?

Mr. Forsyth: There are many small schools where school boards run very effectively and there are others where people have chosen not to have school boards. The point is clear. The Government have given parents a choice and a voice in education. I hope that the whole of Scotland will recognise that Labour Members have opposed us every inch of the way while we have sought to enfranchise parents and to give them more say in the education of their children. I do not believe that the proposal put by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) is the way forward. The way forward is to give school boards a greater role in education in Scotland.

Germany

12. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his visit to Germany.

Mr. Lang: I had a successful visit to Bavaria in September last year when I led a trade mission organised by Scottish Financial Enterprise. The mission has assisted in establishing stronger financial and commercial links between Scotland and that part of Germany.

Mr. Darling: Does the Secretary of State accept that one of the reasons for Germany's outstanding economic success is its decentralised form of government? Does he not also accept that Scotland would gain by having its own Parliament with control over key decisions while at the same time using the clout of United Kingdom partnership in a Europe dominated by large countries? The Secretary of State's policy of doing nothing and of stagnation, and the nationalist policy of taking Scotland into Europe's second division, would both be disastrous for the people of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The thing that struck me most on constitutional matters during my visit to Bavaria was the complete incomprehension of my Bavarian hosts that anyone should take the view taken by Opposition parties in this country that constitutional mechanisms can be the key to economic success. In Germany, the Länder compete with one another to keep taxation down. Labour is seeking to raise taxes exclusively in Scotland, which would be more damaging for Scotland's economic future than almost any other proposal.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Bavarians would be just as baffled by his own view that the constitutional mechanism would lead to economic ruin? I am sure that he did not explain that to the Bavarians. When the Secretary of State went to Germany, did he find any part of Germany which had suffered as a result of the devolved system of government? The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), was present at a press conference about recent inward investment in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram). Did the Under-Secretary feel uncomfortable when the owner of the company bringing the investment to East Kilbride said that he would still have made that investment against the background of a Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Lang: I could quote many business men who have said the direct opposite. If the hon. Gentleman cared to read the *Scotland on Sunday* business view survey of 200 company directors last december, he would see that 86 per cent. said that a Scottish assembly would not help the Scottish economy, 78 per cent. said that it would deter inward investment, and 64 per cent. said that they would rethink investment strategy and levels of employment. If the hon. Gentleman does not understand the damage that a tax-raising assembly would do to Scotland's economy, and what the raising of a tax border across the frontier between Carlisle and Berwick would do to the people of Scotland, he had better have another look at his plans.

Mr. Marlow *rose*——

Hon. Members: Speak for England!

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is about Germany.

Mr. Marlow: As my right hon. Friend knows, there is a devolved system of government in the Federal Republic of Germany. If there were a devolved system of government in the United Kingdom, and if Scotland had its own Parliament, would it not be democratically improper and immoral for the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) and the hon. Members for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to harbour ambitions to govern England? Is not devolution a fraud?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend identifies a very important issue which the Labour party has completely failed to address. Labour has failed to recognise that if there is a measure of devolution of the kind that Labour identifies, it is not just some bolt-on extra but brings costs and a down side as well as the benefits that Labour perceives. That is the kind of issue that would have to be addressed. I can see the strength of my hon. Friend's view that it would be very difficult to sustain morally the position that the Labour party advocates.

Mr. Dewar: Reverting to the Secretary of State's foreign travels, does he accept that, by continuing to pretend that there can be no change, that the German option, the Spanish option and the Italian option can never be the British option or the Scottish option, he is in danger of destroying the Union to which he pays lip service?

Mr. Lang: The German option, the Spanish option and the other option that the hon. Gentleman identifies are not

the option that his party is offering the people of Scotland. If he does not understand that, he really should go back to the drawing board.

Electoral Registration

14. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase expenditure on advertising aimed to encourage electoral registration in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am satisfied that the current level of expenditure on advertising for electoral registration in Scotland represents good value for money and is highly effective.

Mr. Barnes: The new electoral registers for Scotland show a fall of 85,000 since 1987. That includes a fall of 16,000 among 18-year-olds. The position relating to the number of 18-year-olds and older is far worse, in that there is a shortfall of 140,000 on the electoral register, which averages 2,000 per constituency. In those circumstances, emergency action should be taken. Is the only way that the Tories can win seats in Scotland by fiddling the franchises?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are spending considerable sums on advertising—£47,000 next year and £46,000 this year. We strongly encourage everybody who is entitled to register to do so and to use their democratic right to vote. There are many reasons why the numbers have been decreasing. There have been changes in registration practices, there have been changes in legitimate dual registration—for example, in the case of students—and there have been people moving from house to house and not registering. There is a greater inclination to register near an election. There are also demographic changes. It is virtually impossible to state a single cause without an enormous amount of research, which we believe would not involve value for money.

Mr. Dunn: Does my hon. Friend agree that even a substantial increase in the number of those registered to vote in Scotland would do nothing to alter the tremendous imbalance in this House between representatives from Scotland and those from England?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My hon. Friend touches on a very sensitive point. The one part of Britain which was devolved was Northern Ireland, with Stormont. Of course, the number of hon. Members per capita was very much lower in relation to that part of Britain than it is today. It is well worth the House bearing that in mind.

In answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), the number of young people registered in 1991 is substantially up on the 1979 figure. It was 62·1 per cent. in 1979, and it is now 69·3 per cent. We want the figure to be greatly increased; that is why we are advertising.

Mr. Doran: May I make a special plea to the Minister for the case of offshore workers? There are 35,000 offshore workers. So far as I am aware, there is no special advertising targeted at them. That is a serious point because they make a major contribution to the economy. From my contacts with them, I know that there is great uncertainty about their right to a postal vote. Given that they travel to Aberdeen from all parts of the country, it is a central Government issue. Will the Minister take that on board?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will look into that point and write to the hon. Gentleman because it is extremely important that all of them should have the opportunity to exercise their rights.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister may be complacent about the electoral registration figures, but we know that many of his ministerial colleagues are very cynical about this, and see it a last benefit to be obtained from the poll tax in its dying days. Whatever other factors there may be, the Minister knows that tens of thousands of youngsters have been frightened off the electoral register, however misguidedly, by the belief that it would help them to avoid the poll tax.

In the dying days of the poll tax, having had to surrender on every other front, will the Government at least have the decency to go to those young people, to advertise and to use some resources to try to get them back on to the electoral register? The Government have taken everything else off those people. They have taken jobs and decent training off them. Will they at least leave them the right to vote, so that they can exercise their democratic right to change the Government of this country?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The fundamental principle is that where electors are entitled to register they should do so, but the hon. Gentleman should examine his own record. He supported the Stop It campaign and discouraged people from paying, and there were payment delays. Indeed, a number of Opposition Members delayed their payments, and at least one has not paid.

Labour Statistics

15. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many young people under 24 years of age are unemployed in Scotland; how many of them are long-term unemployed; what plans he has to reduce these figures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is available for the 16 to 24 age group only. In October 1991 there were 68,674 unemployed 16 to 24-year-olds in Scotland, of whom 13,589 had been unemployed for more than a year.

The Government have introduced the most comprehensive range of measures ever in this country to help unemployed people back to work. The measures include a wide range of assistance from the employment service, youth training, employment training and employment action. However, in the final analysis it is a productive economy which provides new jobs, and we are vigorously removing barriers to economic growth.

Mr. Marshall: The Minister must be thoroughly ashamed of those figures. They are not numbers in a balance sheet; they represent real people trapped in the misery and poverty of unemployment. Many of those people are denied benefits by the Government. Has the Minister not even begun to realise the frustrations of young people in Scotland who see their future and their hopes being destroyed by his party? When will he realise

that the only unemployment that we in Scotland want to see is that of Tory MPs after the next election, when a Labour Government will be elected?

Mr. Allan Stewart: Obviously the hon. Gentleman has not read the most recent opinion polls. He represents a party which, when in government, has always increased unemployment. On the question of youth unemployment, the present Government have given school leavers a guarantee of youth training—a guarantee that was never given by the last Labour Government and is unique in Europe. The present Government have brought in employment action as an extra weapon in the battle against unemployment. If the hon. Gentleman really cared about unemployment among 16 to 24-year-olds he would dissociate himself from his party's policy of a national minimum wage. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members laugh. Did not they see the report in the Sunday newspapers that Coats Viyella, a major employer in my constituency, is expressing concern about the effects of a national minimum wage?

Several hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This behaviour is very unseemly. I hope that the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) is not rising because he was not called. I think that I shall call a lady Member first.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Secretary of State for Education and Science given you notice that he will this afternoon make an urgent statement about the state of our schools? In a school in my constituency, a three-storey wall has collapsed into a classroom. Because of the danger to the children, the school is now closed. An urgent statement about the state of our schools and about what the Government intend to do about it would be appropriate.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the Government Whip will have heard the hon. Lady's remarks, but she will have an opportunity tomorrow to put the matter to the Leader of the House at business questions.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland has just made a statement about Coats Viyella—a very well known public company—in relation to the Labour party's policy on a minimum wage. I understand that the press report has been commented on by Coats Viyella itself. The company has made it very clear that it wishes to be dissociated from the misreporting and the travesty of its views. I fear that this Minister of the Crown must have been aware of that fact as he continued to spread the inaccuracy. Does not he owe us an apology?

Mr. Speaker: I cannot be held responsible for what is said.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It arises out of Scottish questions. With respect, every time that you, Mr. Speaker, call an English Tory when a large number of Scottish Labour Members of Parliament stand in their places to be called during Scottish questions, it fuels my suspicion that you, Mr. Speaker, and some of your English Tory friends are in a——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that at once.

Mr. Foulkes: Some of your English Tory friends——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should know that I have no friends.

Mr. Foulkes: I suspect that some English Tory Members—whether or not you, Mr. Speaker, are friendly with them—are in an unholy alliance with the Scottish National party, to help the break-up of the United Kingdom. That suspicion is growing very strongly.

Mr. Speaker: I have heard many extraordinary allegations in this Chamber, but never anything quite as wild as that.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. English Members of this United Kingdom Parliament do not complain when Scots come over the border and sit in English seats. Nor do we complain when Scottish Members join in English questions. They should exhibit a little reciprocity.

Mr. Speaker: I think that all Scottish right hon. and hon. Members understand this—we seem to have this at every Scottish Office Question Time. English Members of Parliament are called during questions on subjects that concern the United Kingdom. If the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) will read *Hansard* tomorrow, he will find that there were questions today about Germany, electoral registration, and so on. I do not propose to allow a debate on how I decide which right hon. or hon. Member to call.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the nature of the exchanges during Scottish questions this afternoon—when the allegation was made by some that lies were told, and others were called traitors—will you, Mr. Speaker, recommend to the Secretary of State for Scotland that he arrange talks between Conservative Members, Scottish Labour Members, and Scottish National party Members before we next have Scottish questions, so that it may be more seemly?

Mr. Speaker: If Scottish questions were more like Ulster questions, it would probably be a happier occasion.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I say on behalf of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House that we assume that you, are a friend to all Back Benchers; we acknowledge that. As a Welsh-born Scottish Member of Parliament who looks after the interests of an English constituency, I acknowledge that you do your best—even though you did not call me during Scottish questions today.

In response to an earlier point of order, you said, Mr. Speaker, that you try to ensure that questions are relevant to the United Kingdom when you call English Members. Every question on the Order Paper for Scottish Question Time is relevant to the whole United Kingdom and the love that every United Kingdom Member of Parliament has for our cousins in Scotland.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I will let this blow out.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. When my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) raised his point of order, you, were smiling.

Mr. Speaker: I try to smile.

Mr. Foulkes: Smirking, in fact—as usual.

Mr. Home Robertson: You felt, Mr. Speaker, that my hon. Friend was making an outrageous point. I put it to you, Mr. Speaker, that the conduct that we see from many English Members during Scottish Office Question Time is helping to bring not only the Government but the House into contempt in Scotland. That matter is of great concern to those of us who want to represent responsibly all the people in Scotland. There is a constitutional crisis, which it is up to hon. Members in all parts of the House to address seriously.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with one at a time. I say to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) that I do not smirk. What I was trying to say—I hope that the whole House accepts this—was that I have no special friends. I think that that was what the hon. Gentleman was alleging.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have already spoken about the allegations made by the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). As an English Member of Parliament, I take great exception to the suggestion that English Members seek to undermine the Union—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is what the hon. Member was trying to say in Question time. But he said it then, and it is not a point of order for me now.

Mr. Favell: The point of order is this, Mr. Speaker. English Members have just the same interest in preserving the union between England and Scotland as Scottish Members. Whenever the matter is raised, English Members should have the opportunity to put that point, as should Scottish Members who believe in the Act of Union between our two great countries which has existed for 300 years.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State for Scotland is on record in Scotland as saying that, after the election, everyone who votes Labour will be counted as a Tory voter. May I have your assurance that you still make a distinction between the unionist Labour party and the unionist Tory party in the House?

Mr. Speaker: I shall not be here after the election, so it will not arise.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is because of the narrow, intolerant attitude espoused by the Scottish National party that we find ourselves in this position. We have important business to deal with in the House. I rose on four or five questions but was not called. I accept that; but I take exception to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) ranting and raving but saying nothing about Scottish issues. When people in Scotland see such episodes, they feel that their considerations are not taken care of in Westminster. If one session of Scottish Questions is not enough, I ask you to think again and do something so that the views of Scottish Members of Parliament can be taken into consideration.

Mr. Speaker: I am not prepared to have a debate on how I call hon. Members at Question Time, because it might be painful in subsequent Question Times. May I repeat that Scottish questions—*[Interruption.]* Order. Hon. Members who were called during the previous Scottish questions on 12 December—as the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) was—did not stand quite such a good chance of being called today. I try to call all hon. Members from Scotland fairly.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not have a debate about devolution now.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Many of us in the House do not mind the disproportionate amount of time given to Scots, Welsh and Irish questions, but hon. Members from Scotland, Wales and Ireland should recognise that many of us come from areas of Britain such as the west midlands which would welcome even once a year a west midlands question time. We are the ones who provide the fuel that they consume. We are tired of the Scots being so sensitive about this being their Parliament. It is our Parliament too, and if we are to have question times for minority groups, why not the west midlands, too?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not unsatisfactory that, in Scottish Question Time, we no longer have the 10 minutes that were given to the Lord Advocate? In those circumstances, have you had a request from the Minister to answer Question 38, which could explain why the views of the Scottish police, and, I believe, the Lord Advocate, about Lockerbie are materially different from the stated public view of the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. Speaker: I have not received such a request, but no doubt the hon. Member will receive an answer to his question in the normal way.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): With friendly respect, may I remind you, Mr. Speaker, of the gentle reprimands that you have issued to Members on both Front Benches during Scottish Question Time about what I can only describe as verbose answers—I think that you described them as "lengthy"? If you were to check tomorrow on the number of column inches in *Hansard* devoted to answers given by Scottish Office Ministers, you would realise that a number of Scottish Members were prevented from being called today.

Mr. Speaker: I might.

Pre-wired Plugs

3.44 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Plugs and Sockets Etc. (Safety) Regulations 1987 to require pre-wired plugs to be fitted to all domestic appliances by the manufacturer.

On Friday, the House gave a Second Reading to a Bill which will save lives on the roads. Today, I beg leave to introduce a Bill which will save lives in the home and at work, a Bill which will make it necessary for a plug to be attached to an electrical appliance before it is sold to the general public.

I am grateful to the Consumers Association, the National Association of Women's Clubs and other organisations and to the many people who have written to me in support of the Bill. I am especially grateful to LBC Radio, to my hon. Friends the Members for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) and for York (Mr. Gregory) and to the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) for their help. Above all, I am grateful to the BBC's "Watchdog" programme, to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and to *The Mail on Sunday* for campaigning over a long period to ensure that this necessary safety measure is introduced.

The campaign has been necessary for two reasons. First, every year there are approximately 2,000 non-fatal accidents involving plugs which necessitate medical treatment. Sadly, there are also fatal accidents. Earlier this year, Mrs. Julie O'Toole, a 26-year-old mother from Walsall, was electrocuted when a wire came loose in a plug, making her washing machine live. That is just one of the tragedies which might have been avoided if the Bill had been law. Last year, 28 people lost their lives in similar accidents. That is a sad and horrific waste of life, which could so easily be avoided by adopting these proposals.

Research by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents shows that every household has at least one potentially lethal plug. A survey of 20,000 homes discovered wrong fuses fitted, live and neutral wires reversed, earth conductors unconnected, terminal screws loose and damaged insulation. A survey of 1,000 homes by the BBC's "Watchdog" programme revealed that as many as seven plugs in each house may be faulty, often because people do not know how to fit them. The Consumers Association's home inspection survey found that one in 23 plugs are dangerous, one in nine had to be replaced because of a fault, and one in four were inadequately wired internally.

When those findings are weighed against the minor cost of pre-fitted plugs—the consumer would have to buy a plug in any case—and consideration is given to the savings in time and frustration to the elderly, the infirm, the poorly sighted and the plain clumsy, like me, who find wiring plugs a difficult exercise, the case for the Bill is overwhelming.

The Government sought to improve safety by introducing the Plugs and Sockets Etc. (Safety) Regulations in 1987, which required all 13 amp plugs supplied in Britain to be approved by an authorised body. That was a major advance. Despite those regulations, a survey by the Consumers Association some time after their introduction showed that 65 of 153 plugs bought were non-approved and should not have been on sale.

The regulations do nothing to cover the problem of faulty wiring of a plug by the customer. The Government have sought to ensure that all plugs sold are safe, but that is no help if a plug is wired incorrectly. We need safe wiring of plugs as well as safe plugs. That can be achieved by compelling manufacturers to fit moulded-on plugs to all domestic electrical appliances. That simple method would make it certain that plugs were fitted correctly and safely and were equipped with the correct fuse.

I said earlier that *The Mail on Sunday* campaign was necessary for two reasons: first, because of safety, and, secondly, because the Government were not minded to improve the Plugs and Sockets Etc. (Safety) Regulations. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South raised this important subject in an Adjournment debate in 1989 to voice his concern about it. He was told by the then Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs:

"Any proposal of the sort he has made would result in the introduction of new legislative burdens on industry and would fly in the face of one of the Government's prime vehicles for the creation of wealth . . . deregulation."—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1989; Vol. 147, c. 1273.]

The Minister went on to list the improvements that had already been made and he said that any further legislation would therefore be unnecessary. He reaffirmed that the Government's objective was to stimulate enterprise through individual initiatives to meet the demands of the market by removing unnecessary controls on the trading environment. He conceded that, in exceptional circumstances, one could depart from that stance, for example, because of safety considerations.

Since that Adjournment debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South and many others have sought to convince the Government that safety is paramount. There have been many discussions and meetings with those concerned in the past two years. The Bill is designed to bring this country into line with all the other countries in the western world.

From those discussions it has become clear that the current Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), is sympathetic to the need to introduce changes to make electrical appliances safer. He has accepted the arguments put forward, and I welcome that and thank him for the work that he has done. The Minister could short-circuit the system if he sought to introduce proposals to amend the present plugs and sockets regulations. I would encourage him to do so because even if leave is given to introduce the Bill it could fall if an early general election were called.

I was encouraged when I read the latest edition of *The Mail on Sunday*—I do not believe everything that I read in that newspaper, apart from the opinion polls—which said that the Minister might even implement changes to the regulations this week. It reported that the change would mean that, in future, all electrical goods sold in Britain would have to have pre-fitted plugs. I would welcome such a change.

The thought that my Bill may have influenced the Minister is a satisfying one. It might even tempt me to introduce another ten-minute Bill, perhaps to reduce the pension age for men from 65 to 60 in the hope that that met with similar success. However, the measures referred to by *The Mail on Sunday* have not been revealed by the Minister, so I have decided to introduce my Bill.

My hon. Friend the Minister may move to higher office between now and the timing of any announcement. He may well be replaced by a Minister who is less sympathetic to my proposals. Therefore, the House should have the opportunity to enact this important legislation that would save lives and reduce injuries.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ken Hargreaves, Mr. David Alton, Mr. David Amess, Mr. John Bowis, Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe, Sir Patrick Duffy, Mr. David Evennett, Mr. Conal Gregory, Mr. David Sumberg and Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Pre-Wired Plugs

Mr. Ken Hargreaves accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Plugs and Sockets Etc. (Safety) Regulations 1987 to require pre-wired plugs to be fitted to all domestic appliances by the manufacturer: And the same was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 February and to be printed. [Bill 61.]

Local Authority Finance

3.53 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have just been to the Board to collect an answer to a written question to the Department of the Environment. The answer affects tomorrow's debate on the rate support grant.

The question required a simple, but lengthy, calculation exercise relating to figures put before the House on 26 November in relation to the standard spending assessment report. I wanted to know what percentage of the poll tax comes from the business rate and what percentage comes from other avenues. The House should have such information and I should not have been told that the question would be answered shortly. We must have the answer immediately; that information should be before us. The only reason that the Department of the Environment can have for not answering the question is to deprive the House of that information.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman must take it up with the Department concerned.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It was not really a point of order.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) has just been to the Table Office and, at the end of the day, it is up to you, Mr. Speaker, to adjudicate in arguments between the Table Office and an hon. Member. My hon. Friend is drawing attention to the laggardly way in which the Government are operating. Only the other day, the Prime Minister was rabbiting on about a citizens charter and answering letters on it, but the Government cannot even give my hon. Friend an answer to his question.

Mr. Speaker: Yes; but the hon. Gentleman was complaining about the content of an answer.

WAYS AND MEANS

Education (Schools) Bill

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education (Schools) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment into the Consolidated Fund of sums received by the Chief Inspector of Schools in England or the Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales under the Act.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clark.]*

Orders of the Day

Education (Schools) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 1

PROVISION OF INFORMATION ABOUT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

'—(1) The Secretary of State may make regulations requiring the appropriate authority for every school in England and Wales to which section 9 applies to make available either generally or to prescribed persons, in such form and manner and at such times as may be prescribed, such information about arrangements for the consideration and disposal of any complaint which is to the effect that a report of an inspection under section 9(1) or (2) is seriously misleading.

(2) In this section "appropriate authority" has the meaning given by section 9.'—*[Ms. Armstrong.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.57 pm

Ms Hilary Armstrong (Durham North-West): I beg to move, That the new clause be read a Second time.

The new clause seeks to make the Bill slightly more tolerable. We opposed the measure throughout the Committee stage because it will seriously damage standards in schools and the quality of information available to parents, local communities and members of staff. The progress that each school makes is to be monitored through inspections. The new clause relates particularly to the inspection part of the Bill.

We are still confused and uncertain about why the Government suggest that form of inspection for schools. They make no such suggestion for other parts of the public services and certainly not for the private sector. The House has roundly rejected the suggestion that those parts of both the private and the public sector responsible for services used by the public should be responsible for their own inspections, yet that is what we are considering today for schools.

There is a consensus that we need, above all, to tackle the quality of education available to all children, not just a few. That consensus should have led to improving the current inspection arrangements rather than dismantling them and bringing in private inspectors chosen by individual schools. That has been calculated to ensure that there is no national monitoring of standards in schools. No one is confident that that form of inspection will work.

I confess that I have not had much time to read today's newspapers, but they contained a letter from more than 20 organisations, including all the parent organisations concerned with education, expressing their very deep concern about the inspection arrangement outlined in the Bill. Because those involved in those organisations, who give hours of their time voluntarily, want the highest standards available and the most impartial but expert inspections to ensure that those standards are maintained, they are outraged by the Government's proposals.

New clause 1 is a modest proposal—some of the more exciting plans are put forward in later new clauses. The new clause largely arises from the experiences of those of us who have been involved in public sector organisations when trying to elicit information and ensure that the people on the receiving end have the opportunity to find out when the information does not stand up. The clause deals specifically with the manner in which complaints can be made, and the fact that there must be clarity on complaints procedures.

I know that many parents find it difficult to complain about what is happening in a school, even when they know the procedure for doing so, as they are anxious that they may affect——

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who I know has much more information to give the House. My two youngest children go to Prescot primary school in my constituency.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): It was named after our hon. Friend the Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), was it not?

Mr. Howarth: Actually, Prescot is spelt with one "t", which is crossed—I do not know what happened to the "i".

The excellent headmistress of that school, Nora Giubertoni, has found that the other so-called reforms for which she as headmistress is responsible, are difficult to manage. Although the school is still excellent, she spends much time messing about with budgets and tasks that she never envisaged having to undertake when she entered the teaching profession. Will my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) give me an idea of the impact that the extra work will have on Mrs. Giubertoni and the governors who are already hard pressed?

Ms. Armstrong: My hon. Friend has made an important point. There are various sick jokes circulating the teaching profession about the amount of "overload", "innovation fatigue" and other such phrases. The Government have seriously mismanaged change in education, and my hon. Friend has shown yet another example of that.

People are not saying that they are resistant to change, but they want to be part of it, consulted about it and taken along with it. Most of all, teachers want to be able to do the job for which they were trained and for which I had always understood they were paid—teaching children well.

The Government have some ideological problem—to put it politely—with other organisations, particularly what they call the educational establishment. That establishment is a difficult one to name, and sometimes the people involved in it are called "wise men", which somewhat disturbs me, given that most of those involved in primary teaching are women. The educational establishment has been trying to get the Government to think about change in a different way.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) is absolutely right: many teachers feel that the additional jobs that they have to do detract from the quality of teaching that the school is able to provide. I have talked to many governors who are concerned about that. They want to be involved in and consulted about inspection, but they do not feel that it is their role to choose their own inspectors.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): My hon. Friend will not yet be aware that a report has been made by Her Majesty's inspectorate on Ackworth middle school in my constituency. The report was critical in some respects of what was happening but it was found by teachers,

governors and, above all, by parents to be extremely helpful in setting guidelines for the future of the school. I always found during my extensive teaching experience in secondary schools that the inspectorate was sensible, wise, forward looking and, above all, seeking to raise the standards of each and every pupil in the school that it was inspecting. I took that view even when I disagreed with it. Would it not be a disaster if the Bill in its entirety were to be enacted?

Ms. Armstrong: My hon. Friend is right. If the Bill is enacted, it will damage standards within schools. More particularly, it will destroy the credibility of inspection. Indeed, it has already done so. I know that the Secretary of State and the rest of us will be cautious when it comes to dealing with vested interests, but organisations representing parents and others that represent governors have expressed serious concern about the basic premise of the Bill, which is that governors should have overall control in determining who will undertake the inspection of a school.

Governors do not want that responsibility. They want the credibility of independent inspection and not because they want to shirk responsibility. They want everyone to know that they are not partisan over inspections. We know that rumours spread quickly within communities, and more quickly in some than in others. That being so, governing bodies feel that it is irresponsible to expect them to select inspectors.

Complaint procedures will overload governing bodies if the terms of the new clause are not included in the Bill, and the new clause is designed to ensure that the procedures are determined by the Secretary of State rather than by governors or complainants. We want to ensure that arrangements for the consideration and disposal of a complaint are clearly set down, understood and available. We had a useful debate in Committee on the importance of establishing a complaints procedure.

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend has not dealt at this stage with the role of head teachers. The governing body of Prescot county primary school will find itself in difficulties. The chairman of the governing body, Councillor Harold Campbell, who is the mayor-elect of Knowsley, will be considerably overburdened on account of his mayoral responsibilities next year and may therefore find that the additional work of chairing the governing body will cause him considerable problems. Can my hon. Friend say how much additional work Mrs. Giubertoni, the headmistress, will have to do? She, too, will be greatly concerned.

Ms. Armstrong: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me about head teachers. We discussed this issue in Standing Committee when we considered the Bill and returned to it again and again. It will lead to additional work, which may detract from the teaching and overall management of the curriculum, for which the head teacher is responsible.

In addition, the relationship between the head teacher and the governing body is very important. They must work well together. We take no pleasure in the enormous problems that are caused when a head teacher and the chair of the govening body hold completely different views about the direction that the school should take. That has led to tragic effects in Stratford school, which is having a detrimental effect on the children.

Mr. Howarth: As far as I know, there are no differences of opinion between Councillor Campbell and Mrs. Giubertoni. They are united in their joint objective: that the excellent education provided by the school should continue. What I am concerned about is the role of the head teacher.

Ms. Armstrong: I hope that my hon. Friend will live with me for a while on this. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The professional relationship—I always deal with professional relationships, although some of those who sit on the Treasury Bench seem to have some difficulty with that, but never mind—between the chair of the governors and the head teachers has to be a strong working relationship. They must be able to trust each other in performing their different roles. Both those roles are critical——

Mr. Howarth: And complementary.

Ms. Armstrong: Yes, and complementary.

The governors will have to rely heavily on the advice of the head teacher in many primary schools as to who should be chosen to form the inspection team. They will rely on the head teacher for advice about the qualities to be looked for and the role that the inspection team is to fulfil. If the governors receive a good report which makes them say to themselves, "Is this a bit of a whitewash? Are we getting to the heart of how to improve and develop education in this school?", they may begin to wonder whether the head teacher is trying to make things easy for himself or herself. If, however, they receive a highly critical report, they may say to themselves, "How on earth are we to attract pupils to this school after such a critical report? Why did the head teacher not advise us to choose a team who might be a little critical but not too critical?"

There would then be great problems for the head teacher and the governors of the school. It would be very difficult for the head teacher and the governors to work out just what they wanted for the school. That is where the complaints procedures on which we are seeking information from the Government will come into play. How are people to complain if they feel that the report has not been prepared in a proper professional manner, or that it is misleading in any aspect?

In Committee, we talked particularly about the fact that some subjects or some of the more general work such as pastoral care or out-of-school activities might not have been properly addressed. People might find the report or parts of it misleading. What are the procedures for complaining? People must have confidence that if they do a certain thing, they will be pressing the right button to get action.

It is ironical that this week we have had the relaunch of the citizens charter, part of which is supposed to be about how people who feel that they have not got their entitlement from any public service may complain, and what the redress is. Yet in the Bill that is still unclear. We managed to make a little progress in Committee, but there is still a long way to go.

4.15 pm

Mr. Enright: My hon. Friend has not yet mentioned one sector of education. In my constituency, there are not 1 million preparatory schools, but where I taught originally in Surrey there were many preparatory schools and independent secondary schools with truly appalling standards. Some of those schools were conning parents in

[Mr. Enright]

every way. They were cheating them and giving poor education. I want to know whether parents of children at such schools will be protected by the inspectorate. From my reading of the Bill it seems that that will not happen. Therefore, the measure is a partial Bill. The Government are defending their money-grubbing friends who are making great profits out of exploiting poor pupils.

Ms. Armstrong: My hon. Friend makes the telling point that the Government do not give the same consideration to the rights and opportunities of children in the independent sector as to those of children in the maintained sector. He was not a Member when we had the debates on the national curriculum in the Education Reform Act 1988. My right hon. and hon. Friends contended that, if the curriculum was national, it should apply to the independent sector. The reality is that the Bill will not deal with the independent sector. When my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has the opportunity to move another new clause later, he will deal with how we intend to ensure that inspection and the national curriculum should apply to all children, however their parents choose to have them educated. Children have an entitlement to quality.

Mr. George Howarth: Prescott—[HON. MEMBERS: "Make a speech."] May I say to Conservative Members who are urging me to make a speech that I may do so later. On the last occasion that we had a similar debate, I managed to take up two hours of parliamentary time. If hon. Members would like me to speak, I am sure that I could find time to do so.

Prescot county primary school is a matter of great interest to me and to many of my constituents——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): The hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) is talking.

Mr. Howarth: If there were prizes in the Chamber for talking during the speeches of other hon. Members, the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) would be unable to carry them home because she would be entitled to so many.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman *rose——*

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Lady cannot intervene because I am already intervening.

What concerns me is the excellent nursery unit within the school, which is run by Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Jones, and which is attended by my younger son Jack. My daughter Sian attended the unit until last July. Will Mrs. Parker and Mrs. Jones be involved in the process of selecting inspectors? They already find it difficult to keep up with all the young children in the nursery unit and with the demands put on them.

Ms. Armstrong: The answer depends on the status of the nursery unit. If it is part of the school, the responsibility will lie with the governing body of the whole school. It may be a separate unit. In Committee, we managed to get the Government to recognise that children in nursery schools have the right to proper, quality education and that such schools should be inspected. The Government have tabled amendments—and I look forward to Minister moving those amendments—which will deal specifically with that issue.

We are anxious to ensure that there is proper information is available about complaints procedures. I thought that such an issue was at the heart of the citizens charter. We cannot understand why complaints procedures have not been dealt with adequately in the Bill. It is a bit much for us to be expected to do the Government's business for them. I am sure that the Government do not want the Bill to complete its passage in the House before they have dealt with the issues with which the citizens charter also deals.

New clause 1 gives the Government the opportunity to ensure that proper information is available about the procedures for complaints, whether about misleading reports or about an inspection that is seen to be inadequate because it has not taken account of all the relevant areas. I commend new clause 1 to the House.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I have a complaint to register about the record of the inspectorate, and I will give one concrete example. A few weeks ago, the inspectorate visited a few primary schools in France and made the most extraordinary discovery: that primary schools in France produced better results than ours do. That has been the case for a considerable time, to my personal knowledge, because my children went to primary school in France. It has been the case for at least 10 years, and may have been the case for a couple of decades.

Most primary schools in France—I have visited schools in France other than the one that my children attended —are engaged in doing two things: they allow children's personalities to evolve, which none of us opposes; and they teach the children, which happens all too rarely in this country. By "teach the children", I mean, to give an example, that they were being taught grammar and also poetry by writers such as Victor Hugo and Stéphane Mallarmé, while equivalent children in this country were reading, at most, sub-Enid Blyton stuff, specially written down for the children to keep them perpetually childlike.

I am astonished that our inspectorate, which once fathered Matthew Arnold, should have failed for 10 or 20 years to notice that, a few miles away on the other side of the channel, they were doing these things rather better. How is it that our inspectorate for all those years failed to notice that there was something deeply wrong in the entire philosophy governing our primary schools? I see an hon. Member on the Opposition Benches nodding—I will not mention which one.

There has been a problem, and it has affected most deeply people at the bottom of society, who cannot escape into private education. So the people who have suffered all these years tend to be those at the lower end, especially those in inner cities.

It is very worrying that the inspectorate should simply catch up with a mood which has developed in society and which has been, rightly, reflected by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, a mood of concern about our primary schools. Reform should have been initiated by the inspectorate, operating against a background not of concerns, modish or otherwise, but of absolute standards, and standards that are internationally measurable. How are the French or German children doing in maths at seven years old? What sort of thing does the average French child learn at seven years old about its

own culture and history? What has been going on in our own schools during that time that we have only now registered? So there is a fundamental problem about the role of the inspectorate during this whole period which convinces me that the Government are right to undertake their radical reform.

Mr. Straw: I am listening to the hon. Gentleman's argument with great care. He will know, because he is fair-minded, that the Labour party concluded that the inspectorate, at national and local level, needed reform a lot sooner than the Government, who wrote these proposals on the back of an envelope some time in the summer.

Since he is waxing eloquent about the French example, can the hon. Gentleman say whether the French have ever considered not strengthening their inspectorate but dismembering it and allowing individual schools to pick and choose their own inspectors, with the consequence, as Ministers have admitted in Committee, that schools will be able to pick inspectors according to their own dogma? Their dogma will not then be brought under public scrutiny but will be confirmed by the inspectors who will share it. How will that raise standards?

Mr. Walden: The hon. Member has raised a valid point but has touched on only half of it. I would not support the Bill if there were no central control over standards in the inspectorate. If any Tom, Dick or Harry could pose as an inspector and thereby ingratiate himself financially with a school, that would be absurd. I would not support it, partly because I have sneaking centralist tendencies in education which I think are needed to balance the decentralisation that the Government have quite rightly gone in for. Grant-maintained schools and all the rest of it are part of that.

What I see in the Bill is a coherent philosophy following that of grant-maintained schools, where there is decentralisation and a less corporate-minded inspectorate. But one cannot let these people run loose, for the very reason that the hon. Member for Blackburn has given. There should be central control, and that exists in the Bill.

4.30 pm

Mr. Straw: I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman for not following our proceedings in Standing Committee. If hon. Members are not members of a Standing Committee, they do not spend their time reading Standing Committee *Hansards*.

The hon. Gentleman said that he supports the Bill because there will be sufficient control over local inspectors to ensure that high standards of inspection are maintained when schools are inspected. I want to draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention an exchange that took place in Standing Committee between the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), and me. I asked the junior Minister:

> "What about a primary school which thinks its strength is in mixed-ability non-didactic group-work teaching? Will the governing body of that primary school be allowed to choose an inspection team that has a similar approach?"

The Minister replied:

> "Of course the school will be free to choose a team registered with HMCI which concentrates on that approach, but the governing body will ask itself whether it is wise to do so if it is offered one particularly ideological method of teaching. That governing body would be at even greater pains to assure parents and the wider community that that method was delivering the results for which it had argued."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 10 December 1991; c. 255.]

The crucial point about the junior Minister's admission is that, whether or not it was wise to do so, the school governing body would be free, in the Minister's words, to choose inspectors which shared the school's approach for mixed ability, non-didactic group-work teaching. That is an approach which the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) would condemn and want to see rooted out from schools. However, as a result of the Secretary of State's scheme, schools can be inspected by inspectors who share such an approach. I do not understand how that can lead to a consistent standard of inspection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind hon. Members that we are not in Committee. Interventions must be brief.

Mr. Walden: The hon. Gentleman has raised a reasonable point, and I will give him a reasonable answer. Let us imagine that the philosophy on reading methods espoused by the spouse of the Leader of the Opposition was in force. Mrs. Kinnock is known to be in favour of what I consider to be the voodoo technique of leaving a book in a room in the hope that a child will—*[Interruption.]* This is a central point. The wife of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) is a primary school teacher. If a school which espoused that method of teaching was to invite an inspector known to favour that method, that would be worrying. I would also find it worrying if there was an artificially rigid school, like a Japanese or cramming school, with a Gradgrind kind of inspector.

The point of the Bill is that there should be a safeguard against that kind of thing. If a school is inspected by this or that type of inspector and receives full marks for its work but does not merit those marks, that will become clear over time and as a result of trial and error. We must consider the Bill in the context of the general thrust of Government policy, which is to allow information about school results to be known. Those results would reflect the inadequacies. If those inadequacies were endorsed by an inspector, the central inspectorate would rumble him.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The governors would be free to choose such an inspectorate. No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) and I would disapprove if they did that. However, under the proposals, they would be able to select such an inspectorate only if that inspectorate reached the national standards imposed by HMI. Under the alternative proposition which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) says he came up with some time ago, if the local education authority sought to impose on the school an inspectorate with such ideological views—there are plenty of Labour local authorities which, on recent form, would indeed try to impose on the school an inspectorate with ideological views of which we disapproved—it would have no alternative. Labour proposals say that a local authority will impose its inspectorate and that only the local authority's inspectorate will be able to carry out an inspection.

Mr. Walden: My right hon. and learned Friend casts the argument even wider. In my humble view, there is a fundamental problem with LEAs' representatives.

[Mr. Walden]

Humberside runs its schools on the basis of 13 per cent. of the electorate. Whatever one may say about the Tory party, it is not yet down to 13 per cent. I listen with a sceptical ear to anyone prating about local democracy when the figures are of that order. I am sorry to say that there are Tory authorities which are in a similar position.

The idea that people operating on such a slender, scarcely existent democratic basis should have total control over education in their schools and the inspection of that education leaves me dead cold. The record of education, particularly in primary schools, shows how easy it is for alarmingly low standards to go undetected, although the schools have been theoretically inspected for many years.

I do not want to hog too much of the debate, but I should like to leave my right hon. and learned Friend with one little message from a primary school in my constituency. My right hon. and learned Friend has not inspected that school, but I feel bound to pass on, in all neutrality, the message from the newspaper "Meadow Express", which is admirably produced by the Bourton school in Buckingham. It states:

"Kenneth Clark"—
without an "e"—
"said to two people to go and report on what Primary Schools are like. He thinks that the Primary Schools should be strict. You should sit in rows and let the teachers have all the fun and we just watch. This is called the three Rs. They stand for reading, writing and 'rithmetic.

They want us to go back to the old fashioned ways because he thinks we are not learning enogh"—
minus the "u".

"The men who did this report said on the news last night that they had no time to see the schools so how do they know we're not learning? We know we are."

I thought that I should pass that on as a piece of——

Mr. George Howarth: Another cheap shot.

Mr. Walden: It is not a cheap shot; it is a piece of grass-roots democracy.

The new inspectorate system—the new information system—will work only if there is considerable rigour at the centre. We must get away from the ambiguous position of the inspectorate in London, whereby it has twin loyalties. One loyalty is to the education establishment and the other is to the Government. The result is that the inspectorate tends to oscillate in the prevailing wind. That has led to the abject failure of the inspectorate over the years to point to the fundamental difficulties in primary education that my right hon. and learned Friend is rightly highlighting.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I rarely speak on education matters, but the House will be aware that I have fairly wide-ranging interests. I was an experienced and highly qualified schoolmaster for quite a long time. I was also an examiner, I was involved in a local education committee, I took a fairly active part in my professional association, and I occasionally wrote articles about education. Although I do not often speak in education debates, I take a marked interest in the subject. During recesses, I visit schools in rotation in my constituency. The comments of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) about the standard of British primary education do not tally with my experience as a schoolmaster or my experience of visiting primary schools in my constituency.

Indeed, not long ago, after a visit to the Wickersley and Northfield lane infant and junior schools, I tabled an early-day motion. I am not usually surprised by what I see in schools, but I was surprised at the very high standards attained by the children in those schools, despite the fact that, although the education authority is a good one, the infants school was able to obtain only £400-worth of books last year, while the cost of providing the papers that the teachers are supposed to read for the purpose of assessment and the national curriculum amounted to well over £800.

I observed the children reading, and discovered that the vast majority of those leaving the infants school were free readers and that the vast majority of those leaving the junior school had achieved reading ages that 20 or 30 years ago were considered to be generally unattainable. I came to the conclusion—I believe that my early-day motion made the point—that it might well be that those children could read better than some of the Ministers who have graced the Department of Education and Science, not excluding, of course, the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

My real reason for speaking on the new clause is that, in the current developments in education, we are seeing history repeating itself. That being so, I want to tell again a story which is entirely relevant and deals with this very serious matter. It is a comment on what is happening historically in education. It is about an inspection of a school in my constituency in the 1860s. I shall not detain the House too long, but the story is entirely relevant. I draw the attention of the Secretary of State's predecessor to it as, the day after I told it previously, his predecessor visited Wentworth Woodhouse to address the north of England education conference. The school that the story is about is the village school at Wentworth, which still exists.

In those days, as a result of the abrasive approach of the Government of that day, there was introduced a scheme of payment by results. Her Majesty's inspectors toured schools to see that the children were learning the three Rs properly. One inspector—not Matthew Arnold, but an acquaintance of his who was also a reverend gentleman—arrived at Wentworth village school, which was not big. He looked at the work and gave the teacher a bad report. Wentworth is the estate village of the former earldom of Fitzwilliam. The earl, who "owned" about 30 parliamentary constituencies, was a Whig, and his eldest son, Lord Milton, was usually in the House of Commons. The earl was deeply distressed that the functionary of the Board of Education should have had the audacity to visit his village school and to question and criticise the schoolmistress. There were stories about the relationship between the schoolmistress and the earl, but I shall not go into that.

The earl took exception to the inspector's very bad report, and in the House of Lords one day he told the President of the Board of Education that he was not happy about it. Shortly afterwards, the reverend inspector was sent to Wentworth school to carry out a further inspection. When he arrived, the earl, the countess, Lord Milton and various friends and relatives from the British aristocracy were sitting at the back of the room. Presumably they were in the area for the shooting season. The purpose of the inspector's second visit was to check the accuracy of his first report. On the second visit, he found that the village schoolmistress had improved dramatically and that the school was now very good indeed. Shortly afterwards that inspector received his reward. As I have indicated, it was

the fashion in those days that school inspectors should be reverend gentleman. This reverend gentleman was raised to the Bench of Bishops.

The purpose of that story is to show that, in the 1860s British education was going through a period of reaction which brought about the obscenity called payment by results. That system was shown to be unsuccessful and entirely contrary to British interests, and it was scrapped. I am glad that there has been a reference to past times in the form of a comment on the Gradgrind attitude. During that period, initiative in education was stifled, imagination was destroyed and a corrupt system developed.

I was always regarded—I did not object to this view—as a rather old-fashioned schoolmaster, but I must say that I believe that we are going back headlong into a situation that is not in the interests of British education and, above all, is not in the interests of British children.

4.45 pm

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend is drawing an interesting parallel. I empathise with him, as the constituency that I represent contains the estates of the Earls of Derby. The less said about them the better. One of them was a Conservative Prime Minister. My hon. Friend predicted that his story would show how history repeats itself. I know that these days it is very unfashionable to quote Karl Marx, but I wonder whether my hon. Friend remembers Marx's words about history repeating itself—the first time as farce, the second time as tragedy.

Mr. Hardy: That is the case. Unfortunately, what we see as a farce is a tragedy for British education and British children.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I am very interested in the hon. Gentleman's tales—of Robert Lowe, I imagine—from the 1860s. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that one moral is that the owner of the school should not have been allowed to influence things in that way? No doubt the owner thought that the criticism of the school reflected on Earl Fitzwilliam.

The hon. Gentleman says that Wentworth school still exists. No doubt it is now owned by the borough council responsible for education in his constituency. The Labour party's position is that the borough council should have a monopoly in determining who inspects schools, that there should not be a choice, which might be influenced from outside, to allow an independent inspection by any other body.

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has mentioned Rotherham borough council. He does not seem to hold it in very high regard. When he made a secret visit to Wentworth last summer he suggested that if there were any school building faults they were due entirely to the left-wing Labour council in Rotherham. Of course, Rotherham council does not deserve that reputation, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman completely ignored the fact that his hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), had a very pleasant visit. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not mind my saying that when I walked into a school classroom that he was visiting I saw him on his knees. He may recall my suggesting that the position was entirely appropriate for people in his Department.

I am sure that the Minister accepts that the standard of education in Rotherham and the commitment of my local authority have been entirely civilised and certainly do not deserve the right hon. and learned Gentleman's criticism.

Mr. Straw: To continue the analogy of the school that used to be owned by Earl Fitzwilliam, if the earl had had the right under public statute to choose and pay his own inspector, there would have been no conceivable possibility of the school's standards being raised. The inspector would have been in the pocket of the people who owned the school. That is precisely the scheme that the Secretary of State has advanced.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend leads me to the point that I wish to make. Although the Secretary of State appreciates the past corruption, it is a great pity for Britain that he does not perceive the inherent corruption and the risk of danger in the system that he has devised. He may well have become excessively influenced by the publicity that he himself engendered. He did not seem to accept a point that I made during questions shortly before Christmas regarding the teaching of reading. I started teaching——

Mr. Howarth: Was that in the days of Earl Fitzwilliam?

Mr. Hardy: No, but it was in the days when there was a teacher shortage, and when some teachers were writing about sparing the rod and the difficulty of secondary modern education. I left the Royal Air Force on a Saturday and started teaching on the Monday. The first morning, I found myself facing 49 boys in a secondary modern school, 23 of whom were completely illiterate.

Mr. Walden: Was that a primary school?

Mr. Hardy: It was, in South Yorkshire—a long time ago. When I visit such a school in South Yorkshire today, I find that the average reading age is three years higher than it was then. There was a dramatic post-war improvement, and the success of British primary schools has been far greater than the Secretary of State may imagine. If he wants to examine weaknesses in British education, the primary sector is not that which should receive his attention.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: One of my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals is that we should get rid of the possibility of the Wentworth situation arising. At present, local education authorities—which Labour wants to remain as advisers—serve as advisers and inspectors. They inspect their own schools, so they are bound to give themselves a good report.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Lady does not seem to have any grasp of the character of British education as it is or will be. A good education authority takes care to appoint a chief education officer or director of education—*[Interruption.]* When the hon. Lady asks a serious question, she should at least have the courtesy to listen to the answer. I do not differentiate between Labour and Conservative education authorities in that respect. A good local authority will appoint a good chief education officer or director of education, recognising that the role of education within local government is unique and special, and acknowledging that it is dealing not with dustbins or bridges, but with children.

[Mr. Hardy]

That chief officer will, in co-operation with the local authority, appoint suitable people to serve as inspectors and advisers. However, supplementing and underlying all that is, and must be, a substantial body of independent, experienced, and powerful inspectors employed by the Secretary of State—capable of making a proper assessment of the state of education in the schools that they visit.

Mr. Walden: The hon. Gentleman touches on a fundamental argument, which I contest. He stressed the improvement that has been made since the last war.

Mr. Hardy: I said that there have been dramatic improvements.

Mr. Walden: Yes, dramatic improvements—and that worries me. It is fallacious to assume that, because things have improved over the past 20, 30 or 40 years, we should be satisfied. That is to undermine our whole education policy and to reinforce the great vice of the British education system—a contentment with low standards. Does the hon. Gentleman know that, after there was a revolution in China in 1949, hundreds of millions of Chinese children learned the language—which does not comprise just 26 letters of the alphabet?

One cannot rest on one's laurels and say that, because there are no longer press gangs and slave trading, society has improved. We must keep up with the best of the bunch, and they are in Europe.

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman makes that observation, even if he misunderstood my point.

Mr. Walden: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will develop it.

Mr. Hardy: I will—the hon. Gentleman need have no worry about that. Primary education standards improved significantly in the post-war period.

Mr. Walden: I should hope so.

Mr. Hardy: If the hon. Gentleman hoped so, he would not slavishly support the Government in Lobby. My anxiety is that improvement will not be possible—and has already been put in peril—as a consequence of the destabilising effect of a Government Department that cannot understand that incessant change has eaten away teacher morale to an extent that causes me deep anxiety.

I know dozens of teachers in South Yorkshire—and this is true throughout the country—who are anxious, concerned, unnerved, or furious about the assumption that they are not doing their job, that British education is failing, and that children are not achieving what they should. Those teachers are sick and tired of the destabilisation and distractions imposed by the Secretary of State. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not understand that the amount of teaching time lost and sacrificed in British schools in the past three or four years as a result of his initiatives has done more to damage and lower British education standards than anything else?

The right hon. and learned Gentleman may find that amusing. I do not find it amusing that people who have given dedicated service to children, and parents who are deeply concerned about the quality of their children's education, should find standards put at risk by a Secretary of State who does nothing but tinker, interfere, and seek to make changes that are very often not justified.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I do not find the hon. Gentleman's remarks at all amusing. I have the greatest respect for his views. He refers to an amendment which relates to an issue on which both sides propose change. When we debate other matters, I will describe the changes of the past four years—they include the national curriculum, and local management—which are now supported by teachers and even by the hon. Gentleman's own party.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about a good local education authority with an inspectorate. I agree that it is sometimes a good idea to raise the debate above the question of which party controls such an authority. I cite the example of Lancashire, which both sides agree ought to be addressed. It happens to be the county of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). It is generally agreed that Lancashire has no inspectorate worthy of the name, and never has had. We all agree that we want an independent inspectorate established which regularly reports back to parents.

The debate makes clear the difference between the two sides. We say that a choice of inspectors approved by HMI ought to be available to the governors—and HMI is an institution that the hon. Gentleman holds in very high regard. The hon. Gentleman's own proposal is that only Lancashire county council should be allowed to undertake inspections—and that although it failed to do so in the past, it should be allowed to provide the sole inspectorate of its own schools. Given the hon. Gentleman's concern about primary education standards, he appears to be on the wrong side.

Mr. Hardy: I do not know very much about the situation in Lancashire, but my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) suggests that the Secretary of State's interpretation is wrong. My own view is based on my considerable experience of the House, of British education before that, and regular, close, and careful observations of education in my own constituency during parliamentary recesses over a long period.

I am deeply disturbed about the state of British education and the amount of time that teachers have to spend preparing for the national curriculum and assessing children rather than teaching them. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Buckingham has left the Chamber. I suggest that he, as a parent, ought to investigate the amount of time that is spent dealing with matters that I regard as relatively ancillary. The Secretary of State did not become involved in education until comparatively recently, and he overlooks the fact that it is easy to start a fashion.

It is one of the great weaknesses of post-war education that, when someone offers an idea, it is seized upon before its validity or worth has been properly assessed. If that fashion starts with someone in a position of influence, unless there is a wise, experienced and balanced inspectorate, that novelty might take off, even though it is not potentially successful or worth while.

With a commercial inspectorate—that is how we have to describe it—if the Under-Secretary of State responsible for schools or the Secretary of State holds forth about a particularly novelty, perhaps even misinterpreting a report from his own Department, which is not entirely unknown,

I guarantee that all the commercial inspectors in Britain will decide that they had better jump on that bandwagon. British education will be more likely to be placed in difficulty than before.

5 pm

The smaller HMI will be responsible for invigilating the quality of the commercial inspectorate, but when I consider the proposed size of Her Majesty's inspectorate I wonder how it will fulfil that function properly in such reasonable time as would allow even the commercial inspectorate to operate with any effect. It is an unlikely prospect that HMI will fulfil that function. I fear that wise, balanced and sensible inspection of schools will be placed at real risk and substantially delayed. The practical elements of the Bill seem to have escaped the attention of some people at the Department.

Mr. George Howarth: The House respects the common sense and experience that my hon. Friend brings to the debate. I am following his argument closely. To summarise it—perhaps he will help me if I am wrong—the current fashion in education or the ideological approach, with new reading schemes or whatever, almost does not matter at the bottom of it all. What matters is the ability, commitment and enthusiasm of the teachers. That is the most important element in the equation. My fear about the proposal and, indeed, the Bill is that that enthusiasm and commitment, already badly undermined by the reforms of the recent past, will be undermined still further. The pendulum of fashions in education will not only continue to swing but may swing all the faster with commercialisation of the inspectorate, as my hon. Friend said in his last vital point.

Mr. Hardy: I will illustrate the case from personal experience. In the 1960s, when I was teaching in a large secondary school in South Yorkshire, I did some research work and wrote articles in *Education* about the teaching of reading. Perhaps irresponsibly, I divided a large part of one year into three groups and tried three different methods of teaching reading. I said that I was a rather old-fashioned schoolmaster. I found that one group did particularly well. It was taught by the methods which, as an old-fashioned schoolmaster, I supported. I wrote an article in *Education* that cut across one of the fashions that prevailed in educational practice in my county. The director of education telephoned my headmaster and said that he was not happy about the article that I had written. I was not greatly worried because at that point I was a prospective parliamentary candidate and I had decided to enter the House rather than become a headmaster.

I was greatly helped by the inspector who came to see the work and who was most supportive. I heard no more from the director of education, particularly after I told the inspector that I thought it distasteful that anyone should tell people what to write in educational journals. The fact remains, however, that the inspector was supportive and honourable, but what will happen with the commercial inspector who has his eye on the next contract or on getting the contract to inspect the school round the corner?

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Like my hon. Friend, I am a former teacher, and I visited every school in my constituency during the summer. Perhaps the kernel of the argument is that the Secretary of State is a barrister who is mainly interested in winning cases and less concerned about learning, in schools. If he were concerned about learning he would be on our side. As the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) said, we want to take issues forward. Privatisation of the inspectorate will not take issues forward one whit. I say that from personal experience, but the press at the weekend supported that view. An article in *The Observer* said:

> "On a typical inspection day in Knottingley, West Yorkshire, last week, heads and inspectors alike agreed that schools will be tempted to award contracts to private 'experts' willing to give a good report."

We are seeing Tammany hall politics in education. Undercutting, collusion and sharp practice could occur.

Immediately before I entered the House, my school was the subject of an inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate in Scotland. The inspectorate did not give us any warning of the visit. They did not send a letter to say that it was coming in two weeks' time. The inspectors spent three weeks combing the school and talking to teachers and senior teachers. They made a report which we had to go over with the local authority. Instead of going forward

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is quite enough for an intervention. I remind the House that we are not in Committee. Interventions must be brief. I call Mr. Hardy.

Mr. McFall *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, I call Mr. Hardy.

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend makes a serious point. A few moments ago I said that the proposed inspectorate would be a commercial inspectorate. It will be in business. Some Conservative Members have more connection with business than ever I had. I thought that people in business sought profit, growth, more orders, more contracts and to maximise their returns. It would look for such a level of business as could be obtained only by making sure that the customers got what they wanted.

The schools will not pay for bad reports; they will pay for good ones. They may be prepared to pay a little more for an inspector who will give a good report than for one who will give them a bad one. That is a serious danger, especially with the weakening and diminution of Her Majesty's inspectorate. The commercial inspectorate may justify the Dickensian conditions referred to by the hon.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right, as is my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), to be so critical of the proposal. As *The Observer* said, the proposal will secure the fixing of private inspections. But may I take my hon. Friend back to standards? We will leave aside the fact that the Secretary of State had to invent Labour's policy in order in a rather mediocre way to attack it. We shall deal with that later. My hon. Friend is right to say that standards rose, although not fast enough and not factually. As the primary report says, there is incontrovertible evidence of a marked decline in the past three years in reading standards at the age of seven. Woodhead, Rose and Alexander, the authors of the report, attributed that decline in part to "considerable disturbance"—I use the exact phrase—in the primary curriculum. The consequence is that, every month that the Secretary of State has been in office, reading standards among seven-year-olds have fallen. If the Bill is passed, they are likely to fall even further.

Mr. Hardy: That is the main reason for my participation in the debate. I seriously believe—I am not making a party point—that what has happened in the past three or four years has been harmful to children and has not been conducive to promoting and maintaining high standards in education. I firmly believe that what we are about today is harmful to good educational practice. I deeply regret that the teaching profession, some people in higher education who are charged with education, and in particular teachers in large schools are so demoralised and frustrated that the vast proportion of them cannot wait to get out because they are sick and tired of what has been happening.

The weekend before last, I spoke to a friend in my home town who had just retired. He had been a distinguished headmaster in primary education in my constituency. I said that I was sorry that he had retired so soon because he could have continued to work for another four years and he loved his job. He said, "I got out, Peter, because I had had enough. I am sick and tired of what is happening and of what has been done to education." He loved his job and was a fine primary school headmaster. If he makes such a comment it should be taken seriously.

For every man or woman who is saying that in my constituency one can find scores, if not hundreds, in every constituency. It is time that we made an attempt to re-establish some stability in education. The destabilisation of the past three or four years will result in disadvantages for a long time to come.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): The new clause is about information—the information which should be available to parents. I cannot understand why the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) should object to school governors being given a choice of inspectors, whether commercial, independent inspectors or those from local authorities, which carry out inspections at present.

From what my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellet-Bowman) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State have said, it is clear that there are marked differences in standards of inspection from one part of the country to another. I was shocked to hear my hon. Friend say that there is virtually no inspection worthy of the name in Lancashire. What protection can be provided for parents—especially those living in Lancashire—if school governors do not even have the right to insist that inspections take place? That case is made: as far as I can tell, there can be no valid objection to the principle that school governors should be able to insist on proper inspections of their schools. I am surprised that the Labour party appears to object to that.

I must move away from Lancashire to another authority, West Sussex, where, far from having no inspections worthy of the name, every school is inspected every year. It is difficult for West Sussex education authority to explain to parents of children in its schools that it is not proposed that there should be inspections only once every four years, because they have been used to a high standard of inspection. They get plenty of information. Reports are available to all schools about pupils' progress and they will shortly be made available to all children.

I wish that the standards that have been set in West Sussex had been more generally applied and were available throughout the country. I dare say that it would be difficult to arrange yearly inspections at once, but it is certainly an objective worth striving for. I hope that, when my right hon. and learned Friend replies, he will tackle that problem. He will know that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends in West Sussex find it difficult to explain to our constituents why we should support the Government's proposal of inspections once every four years, when we have an inspection every year.

I see no reason why school governors should not opt for an independent inspection, as proposed. It is a good safeguard. However, I hope that the education authority will be able to enter schools to respond to any criticisms which may be made, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will also deal with that.

I am especially worried about what might happen if the Audit Commission were to report on the standard of schools in an education authority. The authority is directly responsible to the Audit Commission. The commission cannot criticise anyone else, only the education authority. Therefore, a statutory problem exists because if the Audit Commission is to make a valid criticism of an education authority it must have the right to deal with it, and to enter schools and respond to criticisms as best it may. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will also tackle that statutory issue.

5.15 pm

As my right hon. and learned Friend will know, because I have spoken to him recently about the matter, standards in West Sussex primary schools are the second best in the country. He will also know, because he was good enough to tell me, that standards of inspection are among the top 10. Those standards ought to be repeated throughout the country and should not be confined to West Sussex. Therefore, the Bill is capable of improvement. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will say in his reply that sensible and progressive evolution will bring the Government towards the high standards that are available to us in West Sussex, but which are regrettably not apparent within the limited ambition of the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend will tackle that issue, which so concerns parents in West Sussex that considerable numbers have written to me and to my hon. Friends.

Mr. McFall: My apologies for taking too long in an intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that your patience has run out with me, I shall try to be brief.

The hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) said that the Labour party objects to inspections. That is the last thing that we object to. We are for higher educational standards, but will the inspection regime proposed by the Secretary of State achieve them? Our answer is no, and for many reasons.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) mentioned visiting his schools in the summer. I did the same and the information that I got from teachers was that they were overloaded because of what is happening in schools—the national curriculum, reading attainment, testing from five to 14, league tables and truancy rates. The system is overloaded and teachers need more time to implement the curriculum so that children can learn more.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman appears to go to schools only in the summer. I go all the year round. It is now some considerable time since the summer, and I have found that my schools are getting their teeth into those things. They are delighted that the local management of schools is giving them vastly better

surroundings and equipment. I agree that some time ago we had legislative indigestion, but that is now past. When summer comes, if the hon. Members for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) are still here and if they visit their schools, they will find that there has been a vast change, as I have found when I go round mine. I shall do so again on Friday.

Mr. McFall: The last time that I was in a school was on Monday, before I came here, and the next time will be next Monday. Like the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), I go round schools all the time.

I have found that teachers are demoralised. Last week I was in Kent, and was given the same message. Kent is a Tory authority. They questioned the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister about taking the practical aspect away from the GCSE in English. The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister are wrong. If they go to Tory authorities such as Kent they will get the message, and then perhaps they will do something for our children's learning.

There is too much in the curriculum and teachers need time to plan and to make progress on the proposals which the Secretary of State has put forward.

There is no doubt that reading standards have improved tremendously since the end of the second world war. The number of children leaving school with qualifications has increased. Since 1971, in Scotland, the number of children leaving with three or more highers has increased from 17 to 22 per cent. We have a good inspection team in Scotland. I suggest that the Secretary of State should do a case study on it.

Before I was elected to the House, the school at which I was deputy head was subject to the inspection regime. The inspectors did not contact the school beforehand; nor did we have an opportunity to go over everything with the local education authority. Those inspectors were in the school for three weeks and they spoke to senior staff such as myself, the teachers and departmental heads. They then came back for a further week and, after that, consulted the LEA. They then published their report, which was made public. However, we were given an opportunity before publication to iron out any problems with the inspectors. That is what I call public inspection.

Those inspectors were not in hock to the local education authority or to the school. The regime that the Secretary of State intends to put in place will mean that the team leader alone is validated by the Department of Education and Science. That does not happen in Scotland, where everyone is validated. Under the proposals, governors or head teachers will be able to have a cosy relationship with the team leader. The report produced will be to the liking of that team leader and the school, because the team leader will want more contracts from that school, while the school will want a good report.

How does one prevent such corruption? How does one prevent the head teachers of Knottingley and elsewhere in West Yorkshire from colluding with the team leaders and undertaking other sharp practices? The Secretary of State has not paid sufficient attention to the proposals. They represent a step backwards in terms of the education spectrum. The change is proposed not in the name of improving education, but because the Secretary of State wants to cut the budget for education.

Why are the Government cutting the national inspectorate from 500 to 150? That is what the head teachers of West Yorkshire and elsewhere want to know. Above all, how will the Secretary of State prevent the corruption which the Bill will promote? The Bill is a retrograde step in terms of education, as it will not improve children's learning.

Sir Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): The debate, quite rightly, is about quality in education and, in particular, about the quality of inspection under the proposed scheme of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. It is right that our debates should now focus almost entirely on the question of quality, because that is one thing that we have learnt in the past decade.

I listened, as always, with great interest to my rather Cassandra-like hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden). He reminded us, as always, that the gap between current standards and what we should like to achieve is still large. International comparisons are sometimes tiresome, but they are necessary.

By temperament I am slightly less gloomy than my hon. Friend about what goes on in our schools. Our constituencies lie side by side in the county of Buckinghamshire, which has produced the highest level of GCE passes of any of the shire counties in England, and the second highest of any of the English local authorities. I am sure that my hon. Friend will tell me that that is nothing like good enough, and I will not necessarily dissent.

Does it make sense to have a system under which the governors of schools commission inspection reports? I must tell my right hon. and learned Friend that I still need a bit of persuading on that score. There are qualms about the system because it seems a little odd that an obsessive left-wing body of governors, or perhaps a right-wing one —it is more likely to be left-wing—should be able to commission from a left-wing inspection team a report on what is going on in their school. My right hon. and learned Friend has said that the Bill contains the necessary safeguards against that and, to an extent, the debate hinges on their quality.

I accept that one important safeguard is the insistence on far more information. Even the Labour party has come to accept the need for that. The way in which league tables have become a required part of the scene is all to the good. I do not necessarily want to see different schools rated in order of precedence, but it is important that the right facts are available upon which to make a judgment.

The other validation for a loony inspection team—if I may put it like that—is Her Majesty's chief inspector of education, who is a central figure in the Bill. I had hoped to have a debate of my own on this subject, because some important questions have not been properly discussed. I am interested to know whether the chief inspector will be able to provide the kind of validation that seems to be such a keynote of the scheme that the Government have introduced.

I am struck by the fact that clause 2(5) states:

"In exercising his functions the Chief Inspector for England shall have regard to such aspects of government policy as the Secretary of State may direct."

That gives the Secretary of State a great deal of power to tell the chief inspector what to do and what not to do in the realm of policy, which is a sensitive area. If we postulate the undesirable and probably improbable spectre of a Labour Government with left-wing tendencies, one can imagine the Secretary of State saying to the chief inspector, "What you must do is to pay close regard to the

[Sir Timothy Raison]

Government's commitment to absolutely no screening being undertaken in schools and ensure that comprehensive education is the norm." I do not believe that that will happen, because I do not believe that the Labour party will win the election, but we must recognise that the Acts of Parliament are designed for all Governments. It would be helpful to learn how Ministers believe the provision will work.

Why is it necessary to have clause 2(5)? Why can we not accept that someone who is appointed as the chief inspector is an independent person? Time and again, my right hon. and learned Friend has said that it is his intention that the inspectorate should be more independent than it has ever been. If so, why is it necessary to have such a swingeing provision in the Bill under which the Government can tell the chief inspector what policy he must follow?

Mr. Walden: I shall not try to answer for the Government; that is their job. However, perhaps some of the answer lies in the following question. How far does my right hon. Friend believe that independent bodies, such as the Plowden committee, created a climate of acceptance of low expectations in British education? Given that the inspectorate is part of the educational establishment, or has become so, that climate has helped to create the problem in primary schools, which the Government are trying to attack today. The problem is that one has an inspectorate that is infected—that is not too strong a word—with the same fallacious philosophy that the Plowden report helped to disseminate. I am conscious of my right hon. Friend's special knowledge of that report. I am not being a Cassandra; I am being realistic about this. The Plowden report is why we are where we are today with all our problems.

Sir Timothy Raison: My hon. Friend has raised an interesting question. I spent about three and a half years on the Plowden committee; to try to encapsulate a reply to my hon. Friend's question in a time tolerable to the House would not be particularly easy.

Mr. Walden: I am patient; why not try?

Sir Timothy Raison: That may be so, but I am not sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although a patient man, would be so on this occasion.

In certain respects, the Plowden committee was swept along by the zeitgeist and I do not believe that that report was right in all regards. I do not believe for one minute that the deviationist aspects of the Plowden report, which my hon. Friend and others have analysed with such gusto, would have been cured by an injunction from the Secretary of State of the day to the chief inspector to say that he should not allow that sort of thing to happen. I am sure that, whoever was the Secretary of State, from whatever side of the House, we would have given a fair wind to what was going on then. In that respect, my hon. Friend's arguments do not hold water. I had better not say any more about the Plowden committee.

The question that I am asking my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is serious. He said that one of the safeguards for the quality of inspections under the scheme is the role of the chief inspector. I understand that, but why is it necessary to diminish the chief inspector's independence by giving Ministers a power which would be used benignly and sensibly by my right hon. Friends, but which might be used harmfully by a Minister of a different persuasion?

5.30 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) will forgive me if I do not follow his particular line of argument. Instead, I first refer to the speech of the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who spoke about the pace of change. I understand why he did so, but he should understand that the reason why the pace of change is so great is that we want to improve the quality and standards of state education as quickly as possible.

The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and, to some extent, the hon. Member for Dumbarton, commented on the need for stability, which was also touched on by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in a recent radio interview. Opposition Members call for stability, but that call is difficult to reconcile with their proposals were they to be elected to government. They are pledged to abolish grammar schools, grant-maintained schools, city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme, and even the tax concessions that enable the independent sector to remain. Those pledges will not result in much stability for the thousands of children who are involved in those schools, or for the schools themselves. Indeed, they will result in total instability.

Under the Bill, schools will have more full inspections and 25 per cent. of all schools will be inspected each year. That is a substantial improvement on the present system, in which only about 150 schools benefit from a full inspection by Her Majesty's inspectorate. It has been argued that some—only some—local education authorities, also have an inspection system. As my right hon. and learned Friend said in an earlier intervention, following the publication of the Bill local education authorities have suddenly come up with inspection programmes. It may be pure coincidence, but I think that it is rather more than that.

The fact remains that not all LEAs undertake thorough inspections, which means that some schools in some areas have had nothing that remotely resembles a full inspection. The Bill changes that and ensures that all schools will be fully inspected. Indeed, it takes the wraps off schools.

Local education authorities, advisers will still visit schools and be able to provide help and advice. Interestingly, if an inspection report or a complaint from a parent reveals serious weaknesses in a school, the local authority can draw those shortcomings to the attention of the school governing body, which now bears the main responsibility for what takes place in its school. If the governors accept that they need help to resolve the problem, the LEA is free to provide it. That help can include the analysis of weaknesses that have been identified and the provision of training to tackle those weaknesses. I appreciate that that is not an inspection, but the effect could be broadly the same. If governors want help from their LEA, the absence of a specific power to inspect does not prevent it from being offered.

It should be remembered that, thanks to the Education Reform Act 1988, which was strenuously opposed by the Opposition, school governing bodies are now increasingly composed of parents. Those parents, like any others, want

the best for their children. If they believe that there are serious shortcomings in the school where their children are being educated, they will want those shortcomings exposed and put right as soon as possible. That is enlightened self-interest.

When a school governing body selects an inspection team for its school and its children, it will go not for the soft option or the cheap option but for the best, in order that problems at the school, which directly affect their children, will be identified and put right. Parents have no interest in sweeping school problems or shortcomings under the carpet—the contrary is true.

That answers the point made by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) when she introduced the new clause. She forgets the power that is now in the hands of parents. The HMI team leader will be registered and will be directly responsible for his team members. The inspector's team will have to meet the Bill's requirements and the conditions set down by Her Majesty's chief inspector. The team need not include only those with specific experience in teaching but can include people who are not qualified teachers.

If we were to exclude all those who are not qualified teachers, we would exclude those with knowledge of administration is education and those with knowledge in research. It is important that additional expertise should be brought into the inspection teams, although I fully agree that, in the main, the inspection teams will be composed of people with teaching experience.

Ms. Armstrong: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that not every member of the inspection team will be approved by Her Majesty's chief inspector—that only the registered inspection team leader will be approved? I do not want the House to be under any misapprehension about that. The Secretary of State said earlier that every inspector would be registered.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Lady laboured that point at substantial length in Committee. I am not sure why she chooses to do so again now.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is not that point covered by clause 10? It states:

"No person shall conduct an inspection of any school in England under section 9(1) unless he is registered as an inspector in a register kept by the Chief Inspector for England for the purposes of this Act."

Mr. Pawsey: I am sure that the hon. Member for Durham, North-West has heard clearly what my hon. Friend has just said.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Straw: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has such delight when I stand up. He must be aware that, in an interview last year, the Secretary of State referred to "inspectors, all of whom will have to be registered with HMI and all of whom will have to have a little lion stamp of quality given to them by a central Her Majesty's Inspectorate". That simply was not true and the hon. Gentleman who, unlike the Secretary of State, served on the Standing Committee, knows that it is not true. There will be at least 3,000 to 4,000 inspectors and only some 600 of those can conceivably be registered by HMI.

Mr. Pawsey: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. He apparently did not listen to the debate that took place in Committee, where the point was thoroughly aired by his hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West. The hon. Gentleman has already had the answer.

Opposition Members have said that we are privatising the education service. My understanding is that privatisation occurs when something is transferred from national or quasi-Government control to the private sector and private enterprise. Clearly, that has not happened in this instance. Opposition Members' claims about privatisation are pure scare mongering. They are similar to the claims made by Opposition Members about the privatisation of the health service. In both cases, I deeply resent those unfounded allegations.

It seems that Labour Members are failing to win the argument and are simply trying to scare patients and parents into voting Labour. There is no reason for the electorate to vote Labour other than being scared into doing so by the scaremongering tactics of Labour Members.

Ms. Armstrong: This is an important moment. The hon. Member is declaring his opposition to privatisation. We welcome that.

Mr. Pawsey: I wish that just occasionally the hon. Lady would listen. She fails to do so because she is only interested in what she has to say. I can understand that, but it would be helpful were she sometimes to listen to what is said by others.

I should like to hark back to the so-called golden age of LEA inspection. Let us remember who the inspectors are. They are frequently the colleagues of the very teachers they are now called upon to inspect. That answers the point raised by the hon. Member for Dumbarton on corruption. The teams of inspections proposed in the Bill will result in less corruption.

Mr. McFall: I should correct the hon. Gentleman. I mentioned a case study in Scotland involving Her Majesty's inspectors who were not members of the local education authority and not colleagues of the teachers. The very point that I was trying to make was that they were independent.

Mr. Pawsey: I take the hon. Gentleman's point.

I close by quoting a leading article in *The Daily Telegraph* of Friday 24 January:

"The report on primary schools by Mr. Kenneth Clarke's Three Wise Men draws a thick black line under the post-Plowden experiment in progressive education whose chief legacy has been an almost unprecedented decline in children's literacy and numeracy. Why was it allowed to go on for 25 years?"

The leader continued:

"Furthermore, so pervasive was the ideology being peddled by the training colleges, so Stalinist the influence of local education authorities and advisors, so approving the reports of Her Majesty's Inspectors—the dogs that did not bark as night closed in—that anyone who dissented from the approbation of happy children being kept noisily busy in decorative classrooms risked dismissal as a crank."

That extract from *The Daily Telegraph* leader contains the reason for the Bill's introduction. It sums up the reasons why we need to change HMI and why we have selected the system that we have.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): I support the general interpretation of the Bill and the fact that the inspection of schools—which is to be in depth—will be a statutory requirement. Will my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State put my mind at rest on what may be a slight gap in the changes? Local education authorities such as mine in Warwickshire at present use a system of a basic minimum of three visits per annum by the general schools inspector with a rolling programme to follow up with visits on specific subjects. It seems that that policy will go under the proposed changes.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend give an assurance that, following the changes set out in the Bill, schools that may have to wait for three years for full inspections will still be able to have some inspections?

5.45 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The new clause has prompted a lengthy debate. I was pleased by one aspect of the speech of the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong)—the frequency with which she seemed to invoke the citizens charter and the principles that lie behind it. She was concerned about parents' right to complain and their right to have more information about the quality of the schools that their children attend. We are in the early days of what my right hon. and hon. Friends often describe as a 10-year programme of installing the principles of the citizens charter into the administration of public services in this country. If we have made such rapid progress in persuading an Opposition spokeswoman, who are moving in the right direction.

The new clause relates to complaints and the quality of inspection. I do not think that we require the formal procedures that it sets out. The most obvious way in which people will complain is by approaching Her Majesty's chief inspector, who will, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) said, play a crucial part in the process. The chief inspector will have the overwhelming duty to ensure that the integrity and quality of inspections is maintained.

I did not understand the point made by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West, which ran throughout the rest of the debate, about the form of the inspections. She seemed to make the curious assertion that our proposals might damage the information received by parents in order that they might be better informed about schools and their choice of schools—our intention under the parents charter.

Under the parents charter, to which the Bill gives effect, we set out to give parents in this country far more information than they have been vouchsafed before on the performance of their children's school. In order to add to parents' understanding and ensure that the information is of good quality, we are introducing a system of quality assurance with a new regular inspection by independent people whose quality has been validated by HMI. That is a considerable step forward.

Having listened to the debates, I detect a sense that there is more agreement between the two sides on some of the principles than would be readily conceded. I suspect that it is difficult for Opposition Members in the run-up to an election. They keep saying that they thought of various aspects of Government policy first, which is not the strongest form of criticism to make.

There seems to be universal recognition that, hitherto, the standards of local inspection of schools have been patchy and variable. Standards achieved by the different local authorities have ranged from the excellent standards of West Sussex referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) to the almost non-existent inspection system of Lancashire, where I do not think there are any designated inspectors.

Lancashire is by no means the only county to have fallen to such a low. From time to time, trade union general secretaries have drawn attention to the patchiness of inspections. We are all agreed that, hitherto, local inspections have been inadequate.

Mr. Straw: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way in a moment, but I wish to make progress as I think that we may have agreement on this.

We are also agreed that there has to be a national standard to ensure universal quality of inspection. I am not sure whether the Labour party agrees—I think that it might—that we need a regular cycle of inspection. I sense that the Labour party has been converted by the parents charter to the idea that, for the first time, parents should as of right receive unsolicited and directly the results of inspections of their children's schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) referred to Warwickshire. Inspection results in Warwickshire go not to parents or governing bodies but to heads. The West Sussex authority may be contemplating sending them to parents, but I do not think that it did until we suggested it.

It is a short time since we published the parents charter and announced a system of a national standard for regular inspection of schools with regular reporting back to the parents and a straightforward summary of what the inspection states. I think that all hon. Members who have participated in the debate agree with everything that I have said so far. The only difference between us involves who carries out the inspection. We say that it could be the local education authority if it is up to Her Majesty's inspectorate standards, or an independent organisation. The governors should have the choice. If it is an independent organisation, it must be up to the national standard, which Her Majesty's inspectorate should regulate.

The Labour party says that local authorities, and only they, should inspect their own schools. It says that outsiders should not be able to carry out inspections. In effect, it says that only the local authority that manages a school should provide inspectors. It says that there must be national standards, but we are to have a commission and a committee. It will not be Her Majesty's inspectorate that imposes national standards. After cutting through all the guff that we all know arises from hon. Members on both sides of the House during a political debate, there is only one issue that comes between us. As usual, the Labour party has no education policy worth the name. It has folded in and tried to get on the back of the best bits of our policy.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State is profoundly isolated on this issue. There is virtually no support for it within the Conservative party. He is rather like a drowning

man who is clutching at straws when he seeks support for a policy that is entirely inconsistent with Conservative policy generally.

I am astonished that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should so wilfully wish to mislead the House about Labour party policy and the chronology of events. We said that there should be reform of the inspectorate at a time when the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his predecessors were trying to defend the current system of inspection. That was why—this was way in advance of the so-called parents charter and all that nonsense—we published "Raising the Standard", which set out Labour's plans for an education standards commission. That had been presaged two years before in Labour party documents that called for reform of the inspectorate.

The Secretary of State has talked about Lancashire. Let me quote from a letter written by the chief education officer of Lancashire:

"It is quite untrue to state that Lancashire does not inspect schools. We have inspected schools for as long as anyone here can remember."

When I make my speech, I shall deal with that issue.

There is need for a much tougher regime of inspection by local authorities. The issue that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has talked about has no relationship to the Bill. How does he believe that allowing schools to pick and choose their own inspectors—to allow the provider to be the regulator—can conceivably lead to anything but inconsistent standards and an overall lowering of standards?

Mr. Clarke: In the midst of a great deal of waffle, the hon. Gentleman almost defended Lancashire. I do not think that he often does that, although he represents a parliamentary seat in that historic county. I think that he conceded almost every point that I have made before arriving at the only difference between us. He did not rush out a Labour party document until after I had announced a review of the inspectorate. When he knew that I would produce proposals concerning the inspectorate, he reached for the back of an envelope, to use his own phrase, and rushed out his own proposals.

The parents charter—I detect this in what the hon. Gentleman said—has established universal consent that we should have regular inspection by inspectors who are subject to national standards, and that the results of the inspections should be reported to parents. That is a substantial advance. The argument is whether a choice should be available to governors of inspectors who have achieved a standard approved by HMI or whether there should be inspection only by local authorities, with schools having no choice about the source of inspections.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will there continue to be regular inspections of schools that deal with children with special learning difficulties? I refer to schools that specialise in that area of education and to children who are being taught specially within schools because of their learning difficulties.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend has asked a valid question. The answer is that there will be regular inspections of those schools. The inspectorate's work in validating the standard of inspection will not be changed. There will be the same number of inspectors within HMI.

The argument is whether inspection should be the monopoly of a local education authority, albeit supervised by a commission, which I describe as a committee or quango with the usual appointees—we shall debate that issue when we come to consider new clause 10—or whether there should be a choice. Responsibility may rest with the local education authority if it is up to HMI standards or inspection may be carried out by others. The issue is whether governors should be able to choose and thereby to ensure quality.

The hon. Member for Durham, North-West was less than candid, as the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has been in every one of his frequent interventions. Their principal aim is to ensure that no one outside local government, which manages education, should be allowed to inspect schools. I cannot understand how that is compatible with the constant reiteration by the hon. Lady and the hon. Gentleman of the claim that they share our views about standards. They are insisting on a monopoly organisation—local authorities—to inspect its own schools.

Under the Labour party's proposals, it seems that those from the local authorities who advise schools would take part in inspections. They would examine their own work and then comment on what they think are the results of it. The inspectors would all be employed by local education authorities. They would produce reports that would be sent to parents. They would undoubtedly be inhibited because, if reports become too critical of certain aspects of a school, they will be seen to be criticising their own employers.

The Labour party is obsessed by those who continue to see education as essentially the monopoly of local authorities and the teachers' trade unions. That is the difference between us. The quality controls of independent people and local authority people answer the hon. Gentleman's wild criticism.

The letter that has been cited by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West is signed by many people who have asked us to achieve a consensus. I think that we are rather nearer to a consensus than most people would acknowledge. This near-consensus has been created by the parents charter. The Labour party dare not refuse to provide parents with the sort of information that we shall make available to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) and I have been pressed for a definition of the education establishment. With one or two honourable exceptions, the signatories to the letter cited by the hon. Lady and all the acronyms that follow them are a pretty good collection of representatives of the education establishment. Many of them, including the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and the Association of London Boroughs, could have done something about inspection over the past 10 years. They did not but they have responded now to our proposals. They are seeking to defend the monopoly of inspection rights by their members and by those who currently are solely responsible for schools.

Mr. Straw: Do the right hon. and learned Gentleman's insults extend also to the National Association of Governors and Managers and the National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations?

Mr. Clarke: I shall not refer to every organisation in turn. I said that there were some exceptions. I shall not refer to the exceptions that I would excuse and I am not

[Mr. Clarke]

too particular about the ones that I would attack. Anyone who goes through the forest of acronyms will have a pretty good cross-section of the various parts of the education establishment, which has been resisting most of our reforms. It is now resisting the idea that anyone who is outside the closed world of local government and the teachers' trade unions should be allowed to inspect schools and then to report to the general public, including parents, on what has been found.

The important feature of our new system is the integrity and the quality of the inspection that is carried out. Those of us who advocate the parents charter want to provide parents with straightforward descriptions of the strenghts of schools, which will be praised, and their weaknesses, to which attention will be drawn. These descriptions will come from inspectors whom parents can trust. That is the objective of the parents charter. We put at least as much emphasis on that as do the Opposition. The Opposition, however, put more emphasis on the closed world of local government and teachers' trade unions being allowed to continue to dominate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham talked of what could be a danger. There were exchanges between him and the hon. Member for Blackburn that replicated the exchanges between my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, and the hon. Member for Blackburn that took place in Committee. An example that we have focused on from time to time is a school whose governors are dominated by a dogma of education that is now discredited. We now have what has been described as post-Plowdenism. There are some left-wing ideologues who dominate education in far too many Labour boroughs who are dominating governing bodies, and the example is that they decide that they want to choose an inspectorate that matches their approach to education.

There has to be a safeguard against that, which is Her Majesty's inspectorate. Only the leader of each team will be registered, but the registration will be lost if a report is submitted that plainly is not of the quality that it ought to be. All the members of the team will have to be trained to the satisfaction of Her Majesty's inspectorate. All of them will have to be approved by Her Majesty's inspectorate. For them to be chosen, the quality of inspection will have to be up to standard.

6 pm

If an independent group of inspectors were dominated by dogma of any kind—I refute the defence that the left wing now put up, of accusing all their critics of somehow being right-wing ideologues, since I believe that in the opinion of most people we represent common sense—I would expect HMI not to approve that group. If the results of a particular school were below par, its inspectors would no longer be available to left-wing governors because they would not be approved by HMI.

If the hon. Member for Durham, North-West fears that a team of inspectors might peddle a particular philosophy, she need look no further than a few local authorities whose monopoly of inspection rights she defends. Reference has already been made to the Alexander report on Leeds schools, which shows how Leeds council spent a great deal of money and time on trying to dominate the teachers in Leeds and get them to adopt a philosophy of education that was plainly a failure and that led to lower standards in primary schools.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clarke: In a minute.

The position of the hon. Gentleman's party is that only Leeds authority people should be allowed to inspect Leeds schools. Only local authority staff, under the control of the same political party as that to which the hon. Gentleman belongs, should be allowed to do that. Nobody from outside should be allowed to challenge the basis upon which they inspect their primary schools.

Mr. Fatchett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman grossly distorts the picture in Leeds. I suspect that he is one of the great many who has not read the Alexander report. If he had read it and understood its genesis, he would also understand that it was commissioned by Leeds local education authority. The authority did not try to conceal the report. It published it.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): How long did it take to implement it?

Mr. Fatchett: Who are we going to have—the monkey or the organ grinder on this occasion? It is clear that the Secretary of State does not—[HON. MEMBERS: "Get on with it."] I will get on with it if hon. Members will keep quiet and not shout out from a sedentary position. The Secretary of State continually makes comments about Leeds, although with little knowledge. He relies upon his Minister of State to provide the information. The fact is that Leeds commissioned the report, published it and acted upon it. It would be good if the Government recognised that fact, applauded Leeds local education authority for doing so——

Mr. Eggar: It did not publish all the reports.

Mr. Fatchett: No, that is not so. All the reports were published and therefore are available. The Secretary of State has to recognise that fact and put it on record that this authority behaved in a way that other authorities ought to behave and that Leeds provides an example to other authorities.

Sir Giles Shaw: Before my right hon. and learned Friend replies, he will recall that Leeds community charge payers had to foot the bill for this travesty of a report, which cost £14 million, and that from their point of view it was useless.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is correct, although he made one slight slip of the tongue. In fact, between £14 million and £15 million was spent by the community charge payers of Leeds on experiments in schools that were then condemned by the report. Extra expenditure was embarked upon in Leeds, with results that I should be quite happy to describe. I have read the report. Rather than indulge in exchanges across the Floor, I commend hon. Members to read the report and its clear description of the catastrophe that the experiments caused in Leeds schools.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) leapt to his feet to defend what happened by saying that Leeds local education authority commissioned the report

and eventually published it. He then had an argument with my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) about how long it took Leeds to take any action in the light of the report. I stand by my description of the report. It criticises the council and shows that the experiment was a failure. Despite that experience, the Labour party remains committed to saying that only employees of Leeds city council shall be allowed to inspect schools which only Leeds city council shall be allowed to run. I do not regard that as a defence of quality.

I have already said that I have great respect for the views of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy). He described himself as an old-fashioned teacher. I suspect that he used the word "old-fashioned" in a way that I would regard as a compliment. I have no doubt whatsoever about his commitment to higher standards in schools. We had a long exchange about whether things had got a lot better in the last few years and also about what things were like in Rotherham.

Yesterday, at this Dispatch Box, I praised the standards achieved in Rotherham and contrasted them with the achievements in nearby Labour-controlled Sheffield, which spends more but achieves lower standards. I hope that, at the conclusion of the debate, the hon. Gentleman will accept that he is on the wrong side of the argument. I do not intend to enter into an argument with him about the noble Earl who owned Wentworth school in the 19th century.

The last example that the hon. Gentleman gave related to his expression of views about teaching that got him into trouble with his director of education 20 years ago. On that occasion he escaped only because an inspector helped him. In any case, he decided to make a distinguished career in this House and not to carry on teaching.

The position has changed in the last 20 years—and not just in Leeds. There are boroughs where expression of views that are inconsistent with the ideology of the council gets teachers into serious difficulties. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman groans. If he wants protection against that—I agree with him that good teachers should be protected against it—one form of protection is not to say that only the local authority shall be allowed to provide inspectors, even if the governors want somebody else.

Mr. Hardy: The right hon. and learned Gentleman paid tribute to Rotherham, but he did not do so when he addressed the Conservative party in Wentworth last summer.

Mr. Pawsey: Was the hon. Gentleman there?

Mr. Hardy: No.

Mr. Pawsey: The press were.

Mr. Hardy: The hon. Gentleman is not a competent Member of this House if he does not know what is said by Ministers. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may not have known that certain members of the press were present, but I found out very quickly.

The Secretary of State may have misinterpreted the fundamental point that I made. I accept that standards improved dramatically in primary schools throughout most of the post-war period, but the point that I made was that during the last few years that progress has not been maintained, as a result of the disturbances—that is an appropriate word in this context—that have been inflicted on schools by his Department.

Mr. Clarke: I stand by the criticisms that I made of the garden in Wentworth and the capital and maintenance programmes of Rotherham borough council, but I pay tribute to the standards achieved by its schools—and even to the school buildings, as maintained by the borough council. It is not true, as the hon. Member for Blackburn keeps saying, that the three wise men's report says that the introduction of the national curriculum has resulted in a decline in standards during the last three or four years. That is a gross misquotation. His argument that the changes of the last three or four years are undesirable does not stand up to examination.

When one is asked about the national curriculum and about local management of schools, one finds that there is a overwhelming support for the principle. I agree that it has been hard work introducing it: I always pay a compliment to that. I do not think that the process of change is causing damage; it is paving the way for a further advance in standards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham raised a point which was also referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton. Where local authorities are inspecting more regularly than once every four years, they wanted to know whether that would be damaged by the statutory requirement to have four-year cycles of inspection. Again, I pay tribute to what is being achieved by West Sussex in its comparatively new system of annual inspection. My one reservation is that we are not comparing like with like. What West Sussex calls an annual inspection, as I understand it, is a brief visit and not the full inspection once every four years. The inspectors have regular calls to go into the schools, as has been happening in recent years in Warwickshire as well. My answer to the queries of my hon. Friends is that we could not have annual inspections nationally on the full parents charter without enormous expense. A four-year cycle is a more reasonable timetable.

The local education authority will retain its right to enter schools in pursuit of any of its statutory duties. It will also have the right to enter a school for the purpose of inspection and looking into a problem if the governors have invited it or if it is acting on a complaint. The reason why my hon. Friends resisted in Committee amendments designed to give the local education authority a general duty to inspect is that, where somebody else is brought in to inspect, we do not want local authorities duplicating the statutory inspection under the parents charter so that schools are over-inspected.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I must move on. I am not sure whether we have had a filibuster in the debate, but I do not propose to delay my own Bill excessively. I will give way on the West Sussex point.

Sir Peter Hordern: The point is of importance to all parents in West Sussex. Supposing a parent complains to the local authority in West Sussex about standards in schools, what is the position? Will the authority have the right to enter the school to examine the complaint, or will the obligation remain with the governors of the school to invite the local education authority to come in to examine the problem?

Mr. Clarke: Whether the authority has a right or a duty will depend on the nature of the complaint and whether it

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bears on the statutory duty of the local authority. If it was a complaint about inspection or about some aspect of teaching in the school, West Sussex county council would almost certainly approach the governors for their consent to go in and investigate the complaint. That position would be established under the Bill.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): My right hon. and learned Friend himself posed the correct question on the point a moment ago when he wondered whether the proposed change would damage the existing system which West Sussex is very keen on, as indeed are parents in West Sussex. What is the answer to the question which he posed? Will we be able to continue with the existing system?

Mr. Clarke: We shall certainly do nothing to stop it. I have no reason to disbelieve my right hon. Friend when he says that the system is popular with governors and parents in West Sussex. No doubt it is good quality inspection. I cannot imagine that any governors will start defying parents by preventing West Sussex from carrying on with the system. So long as parents and governors are content with the system, there is no reason why it should not continue in parallel with the system under the parents charter.

I shall not reply at length to the comments of the hon. Member for Dunbarton (Mr. McFall). I am delighted to see him taking part in the debate. When I came into the Chamber earlier to await the start of the Bill, I walked into what I can only describe as a Scottish riot at the end of Question Time and a series of points of order. The hon. Gentleman was one of those who leapt to his feet, protesting vigorously about English Members having the temerity to intervene in Scottish Question Time. The hon. Member made an interesting speech on the Bill. I welcome his participation in a debate on a new clause which would have no application to Scotland or his constituency. At least he has sufficient regard for a United Kingdom Parliament to take part in English debates. No doubt, if there is a vote, he will exercise his right as a Scottish Member to vote on an education matter which has not the slightest application in Dumbarton. I trust that he will respect the continued right of English Members to take part in Scottish debates and to cast their votes on Scottish affairs as well.

Mr. McFall: I have spoken on the Bill simply because clause 17 refers to Scotland. The last thing that I would do would be to prevent English Members from talking about education issues in their constituencies, as they disgracefully tried to prevent Scottish Members doing earlier. While I shall contribute, I want English Members to give their points of view. In that way we will respect the sensibilities of the House.

6.15 pm

Mr. Clarke: That is probably enough of constitutional debate. At least we will accept that the new clause does not apply to Scotland.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth took us back to the key point of the proposition—the quality of education provided in schools and how far it can bear on raising standards. As to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury, the critical figure is Her Majesty's chief inspector. My right hon. Friend is right to remind me that I have always stressed the increased independence which the changes will give to that key figure—independence of Government and independence of the Department of Education.

Her Majesty's chief inspector, the work of his or her staff and the criteria drawn up for inspection will be crucial to quality control. In due course, when the Bill has received Royal Assent, we will see Her Majesty's chief inspector in post and we will see Her Majesty's inspectorate working for him or her. The numbers of HMI—one point which has most exercised the Opposition—have been determined by the best judgment that the present senior chief inspector and I can make of what will be required for the national monitoring role.

My right hon. Friend also draw attention to the clause which allows the Secretary of State to cause Her Majesty's chief inspector to have regard to aspects of Government policy. It may be a cautious thing to put in. It is a limited power. My right hon. Friend may say that at the last moment I drew back from cutting this great and powerful figure loose of all advice and control, but it is not a fettering or silencing control. That clause would not enable the Secretary of State in any Government to stop Her Majesty's chief inspector saying whatever he or she wanted, either on the process of inspection or on any aspect of education standards which HMCI would be free to issue reports on and comment on.

HMCI would only be enjoined by the Secretary of State to have regard to aspects of policy, but if the Secretary of State is to be answerable for education policy at all, at least he should have the ability formally to point out to HMCI that he or she ought to have regard to policy for which the Secretary of State has been accountable to the House. I do not think that goes back seriously on all the other steps that we have taken in the direction of independence. HMCI will be a much more independent postholder, because he or she will have his or her own statutory functions under the Bill, giving independence of a kind that such a person has not had for many years. I am not sure whether there was so much independence in the 19th century; I doubt it. Certainly there will be greater independence than in modern times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth also stressed the quality of education and went back to the main point between us. He talked about all the swings of fashion in recent years and how there have been times when everybody has gone with the fashion. He echoed the words of the hon. Member for Wentworth on that.

In addition to stressing how important it is to keep national standards, my hon. Friend made the case against a monopoly at any given time of inspection in the hands of a commission, local government and so on. The fact that governors will have some choice and the ability in any county to go outside the inspectors who usually inspect there, if they are beginning to lose confidence in inspections, is a guarantee that never again will the whole education world be swept one way or the other without governors and parents having more ability to restrain matters.

We have had a wide-ranging debate. I shall conclude as I began. Odd tinges of the citizens charter imbued quite a lot of Labour Members' contributions. Much of the huffing and puffing by the Opposition disguised the fact

that we have converted them almost overnight to about four fifths of our policy and that they will never again deny the need for regular inspection and reports.

When Opposition Members go on about governors picking their own inspectors, they disguise the fact that they are defending a closed world of monopoly which would be harmful. The one reference to privatising the inspectorate is the Opposition's daftest argument to try to disguise their lack of any policy. There is no existing inspectorate to be privatised. I have never heard the word more misused.

The parents charter is a great breakthrough in the direction of quality control, openness in education, better guarantees of standards, more information for parents, and more ability on the part of governors and of parents to keep an eye on what is happening in schools so that standards can be driven up. For that reason, I trust that the House will reject the new clause if it is pressed to a Division by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): Our debate has been wide-ranging and has had the tone more of a Second Reading debate than of a debate on amendments. I do not intend to make a wide-ranging speech because I did so on Second Reading and in Committee. One point which has been pressed by Conservative Members has not been answered properly by the Secretary of State.

When the Secretary of State was asked by West Sussex Members what would happen about more frequent or ad hoc inspections outside the regular cycle, he avoided answering any questions from Opposition Members or giving a clear answer to his colleagues. The clear answer is that it will be impossible for inspections to take place outside the four-year cycle. In Committee, Ministers made it clear that although local authorities, following their statutory duties, may go into schools and may offer advice, they cannot undertake a formal inspection either of part of what is going on in the school or of the school as a whole, no matter what problems may have arisen.

It has been suggested that it would be possible for inspectors to go into a school following the wider powers which the local authorities have, but there is a catch which guarantees that no such inspections will take place outside the four-year cycle. The catch is that if any LEA inspector goes into one of the schools in the LEA area to perform an inspection outside the four-year cycle, he will be regarded as giving advice to the school and therefore barred from undertaking an inspection of that school in the future.

No local authority can afford to have its inspectors undertaking inspections outside the four-year cycle because the team that it maintains to offer that service to local schools will gradually bar itself from undertaking an inspection in any school in the LEA area. So there could not be ad hoc inspections by the LEA. Indeed, there could not be an inspection service at all by the LEA. That is why the Secretary of State did not want to answer points made by the Opposition, and that is why he did not give a straight answer to Conservative Members who were rightly concerned about the issue.

I hope that Conservative Members who are concerned about that aspect, which does not impinge on the rest of what is intended in the Bill, and about the principle of a need to have ad hoc inspections from time to time when problems arise will continue to pursue the matter. Amendments which would have met the concern of the Secretary of State that LEAs would simply undertake a parallel four-year cycle and which would have ruled out that possibility were tabled in Committee, but Ministers would not accept them. If that point is not pursued successfully here, I hope that those Members who are concerned will use their contacts in the other place to ensure that it is successfully pursued there.

There should be nothing between the parties on this. The issue is straightforward and I fail to understand why the Secretary of State cannot understand the point. Instead, he resorts to sending letters to hon. Members in which he argues that the matter is being pursued on purely partisan grounds. Today's debate has made it clear that that is not so. I hope that the Secretary of State will give a straight answer on that important point.

Mr. Straw: It is plain from the debate that the Secretary of State, who did not serve in Committee, does not understand the impact of the Bill or its major defects. He tried to pretend a moment ago that the Bill says only that the chief inspector "may have regard" to

"such aspects of government policy as the Secretary of State may direct."

In fact the Bill says clearly that the chief inspector "shall have regard" to

"such aspects of government policy as the Secretary of State may direct."

The Secretary of State gave no answer to the important point raised by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and by the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern). I appreciate that the Minister of State is trying to make a point to the right hon. Member for Worthing, but I will make it too. The point was examined at great length in Committee, as the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) has just said.

The power of local government to inspect and to intervene if it discovers that something is wrong is based on section 77(3) of the Education Act 1944. Under schedule 5, that power is to be removed and will not be replaced by any other power for the local authority. As a result of that removal, almost every local authority apart from Wandsworth—certainly every member of the Association of County Councils, Tory and Labour, and also Conservative boroughs such as Croydon—has thoroughly objected to the removal of the power because it believes that if a school faces difficulties the authority will not have the power to intervene. The Secretary of State is legislating for a local authority to be powerless in the face of a school where standards are sliding.

There is another major flaw in the Secretary of State's scheme. Not only will local authorities not have the power to intervene; they will not have the money to employ inspectors who could intervene if they had that power. Under clauses 9 and 15, a local authority can employ inspectors only as a separate, semi-privatised operation——

Mr. Eggar *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Straw: The Minister of State shakes his head, but he must know that under the Bill the inspectors have to be a self-financing operation. They will have to get back their salaries and other costs from the fees that the schools pay for the inspection. Almost by definition, a school which faces serious problems will probably have the governors on one side of the issue and the local authority on the other. It is almost certain that the governors will have exhausted their pot of money to pay for an inspection because an inspection can be carried out only on a

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four-year cycle. The funds to pay for such an inspection will not exist. The consequence is that there is no power for a local authority to intervene and there would be no funds for the local authority to employ inspectors even if that power existed. The Secretary of State needs to answer that point directly.

This has been a wide-ranging debate and we are grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State sought to apologise for the Bill by suggesting that it was not a privatisation measure. Privatisation used to be a badge of honour which was worn with pride by every Tory. Now it seems to be a mark of shame that Ministers wish to hide at the first opportunity.

The reason is simple. When the Secretary of State first published the proposals at the beginning of July 1991, virtually every newspaper said that the Government were privatising the system with private inspectors going into schools. The Secretary of State discovered that he had made a profound political and educational error in dismembering Her Majesty's inspectorate, in cutting its numbers from 480 to 175 and in trying to pretend to an incredulous electorate that the result would be that HMI would be strengthened. It was not until he proposed to hand over inspection not to co-ordinated teams, but to one team of privatised inspectors and it was not until he proposed allowing governors to pick and choose inspectors that he suddenly realised that privatising the inspectorate was going down like a lead balloon both with those running schools and with the electorate.

That is why, in all the great publicity that the Government have come out with recently about strengthening the inspectorate, scarcely a word has been heard about the notion of privatised inspectorates. Perhaps the Secretary of State will now tell me what precedent exists, in the entire administration of public services under this Government, for a provider of a public service to choose the regulator to inspect it. He knows that even with the semi-privatised trust hospitals he insisted not that they should appoint their auditors but that the Audit Commission should do so.

6.30 pm

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) for inviting me to intervene by asking questions. He mentioned my objection to the word "privatised". I am not against privatising commercial activities, but it is a word that we should use correctly. It means transferring something which goes on in the public sector into private hands.

The hon. Gentleman has always acknowledged—this time he did not, he tried to go back on it, but I repeat my own belief—that there is no inspectorate in Lancashire. There is nothing being transferred from the public to the private sector. A new inspectorate is being put in place, and the hon. Member is misleading the public to keep on about our privatising it.

It is really no good the hon. Member for Blackburn lecturing me or any other member of the Government on the need to separate inspectors from providers of service. The people who inspect will be independent of the governors. They will be taken from the list of those registered by Her Majesty's inspectorate, nationally approved, independent inspectors. The provider will have a choice between two inspectors, both of whom are quite separate from the providers.

The hon. Member's proposition is that the providers, Lancashire county council, should be the only people entitled to inspect their own, the provider's, schools. He is misusing the argument, and it can easily be turned against him. He is resisting the independence of inspection that the Bill introduces.

Mr. Straw: I asked the Secretary of State a straight question and he has sought to waffle for about three minutes in reply. He said nothing about what I had asked him, but at least he has confirmed that he cannot draw a single precedent to our attention of a provider of a public service, under this Government, being able to pick and choose its own regulator.

Mr. Clarke: Will the hon. Member for Blackburn agree that his position is that Lancashire county council should be the only people allowed to inspect Lancashire schools? What sort of independent regulator or guarantee of independent quality is that?

Hon. Members: Answer!

Mr. Straw: We will deal with Labour's proposals under new clauses 10 and 20. Our proposals will ensure that there are far more rigorous standards of inspection and also that the inspectorate stands at arm's length from the people it inspects. If the Secretary of State is going down the ludicrous road of asking whether the inspectors are to be employed by the local authority, I remind him that the police are employed by the local authority but are able to exercise independence. Twice I have put a straight question to the Secretary of State and twice he has refused to answer it. What he proposes to set up is a system without parallel, even under this Adminstration.

To their credit, the present Administration have at least ensured, when privatising a public service, that the regulator is separate from the provider; but here we have a situation where the provider is to be the regulator. It is because of that, because the governing body of the school, including the head teacher, is to pick and choose its own inspector, that nobody with any experience either of the regulation of public services or of the educational services supports the proposals.

HMI does not. For the first time in 150 years, HMI came here last Thursday to lobby hon. Members on both sides and to tell them that the scheme proposed by the Secretary of State was profoundly defective, would undermine and weaken the inspectorate and would lead to inconsistent standards of inspection. HMI, which is supposed to run this ramshackle system, has itself said that it cannot work.

The National Association of Governors and Managers, in whose interests, apparently, this has been set up, has said the same. The National Confederation of Parent-Teacher Associations has said it. So, too, have scores and scores of head teachers who, as reported in *The Observer* on Sunday, said that it could not lead to consistent standards of inspection and some of whom said that they would "fix" these private inspections.

There has never been a crazier, more ludicrous scheme for trying to raise standards. It will lead to a lowering of standards and it must be opposed.

Question put and negatived.

New Clause 2

FUNCTIONS OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR WITH REGARD TO THE CURRICULUM

'In Section 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988, in subsection (1), after paragraph (a) there shall be inserted—

"(aa) of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in England as respects every maintained school in England;

(bb) of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in Wales as respects every maintained school in Wales;".'—*[Mr. Fatchett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Fatchett: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) moved new clause 1, she said that it was a modest new clause. Perhaps that was characteristic of her own approach, but I am sure that she did not expect the sort of debate that the new clause stimulated. If I may make a slightly immodest point at this stage, I feel that new clause 2 is probably more important than new clause 1. It is not the modest clause that new clause 1 was, because it relates directly to the inspectorate and the independence of the chief inspector.

In the previous debate, we had comments, particularly from the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison), about the need to preserve the independence of the chief inspector. The right hon. Member for Aylesbury specifically drew attention to clause 2(5), which I think the Secretary of State had not had an opportunity to read, because when he referred to clause 2(5) he spoke of the word "may", whereas the word "shall" is used in the Bill. The crucial element of the new clause is the preservation of the independence and integrity of HMI.

To achieve that objective, the new clause would insert in section 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988 the responsibility of the chief inspector to make sure that the national curriculum is delivered within the terms of the 1988 Act.

It is interesting to recall the debates on the Education Reform Bill. My colleagues who served on the Standing Committee will recall that the Government said at the time that it was the last substantial piece of education reform that they expected in this Parliament. It was deemed to be similar to the Education Act 1944 and would set in place a legal framework for education for many years. It is not without significance that this year we are debating two major education Bills, neither of which will probably be enacted but both of which attempt to fill the gaps already created by the Education Reform Act 1988.

One thing was clear from the debate on new clause 1: the respect of those who know about education for the independence and integrity of HMI. Anybody involved in education recognises that HMI performs a difficult task with integrity, skill and knowledge of the education system. The inspectorate is an essential attribute of the system, and the independence of the chief inspector is an important element in putting the system above party politics, making it a national system and one in which, while we may disagree about many aspects, we may have some national pride. The inspectorate is valuable in its own right and it is therefore important that we try in new clause 2 to preserve its integrity and independence.

We have moved new clause 2 not simply because of that traditional respect for Her Majesty's inspectorate, but for other reasons. It is crucial that new clause 2 is added to the Bill because the measure as it stands would create a charter if not for corruption, certainly for collusion about inspection. That point was made in our earlier debate on new clause 1.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) realised as a result of interventions by Opposition Members that only the leader of an inspection team requires the approval of the chief HMI. The rest of the team could comprise anyone. As I said on Second Reading, the net could be cast so widely, that even the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) might be a member of an inspection team. Only the team leader must be approved by the senior HMI. As the hon. Member for Buckingham recognised, that system could work only on the basis of, to use his term, trial and error.

The wrong inspectors may be appointed. The definition of "wrong" is interesting. Do we mean wrong ideologically or in terms of efficiency? It has been said that, if the wrong inspectors are appointed, the right team might appear on subsequent occasions. If the wrong team has been chosen, during the rest of the four-year cycle, the standards in the school concerned will decline. The best defence that the hon. Member for Buckingham could offer for that system was that it would be based on trial and error. Our schools and the education of our children are too important to depend on a system that relies simply on trial and error.

Mr. Pawsey: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that parents are concerned about the quality of their children's education? The quality of that education will depend at least to some extent on the quality of the inspection. Why does not the hon. Gentleman agree that parents will ensure that they select the best teams to inspect school adequately?

Mr. Fatchett: In a sense, the hon. Gentleman has just made my argument for me. Obviously good education depends on good inspection. However, the hon. Member for Buckingham and the right hon. Members for Aylesbury (Sir. T. Raison) and for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) made similar points. There is no guarantee that an inspection team will be appropriate or efficient. It may prove to be the wrong inspection team.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth fell back on the argument of parental choice. He said that parents will be able to choose a new inspection team. Let us consider a primary school that is inspected by a trial and error team which I will call T and E inspection. That inspection may take place when a child is half way through the primary cycle. Four years on, that child will be out of the primary cycle, and into the secondary cycle. What parental right will then exist?

We have learnt from the Secretary of State for Education and Science that there is no guarantee of a right of complaint. Parents will not be able to demand a further inspection. In those circumstances, that child's education will be put at risk. That is what the T and E system will create and that is the system which the Government and the hon. Member for Buckingham are advocating.

Mr. Pawsey: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's basic premise. Why should there be trial and error? I do not understand why he uses that phrase. If a team leader is registered, he will ensure that the team with which he is working and for which he is responsible, will perform its

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work satisfactorily. The hon. Gentleman is straining at gnats, such is the weakness of his argument. He is calling into aid the most improbable situation.

Mr. Fatchett: I am not calling into aid improbable situations. With his sycophantic enthusiasm for Government policy, the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth tends to forget that the statements were made by the hon. Member for Buckingham and the right hon. Members for Aylesbury and for Worthing. They expressed concern.

6.45 pm

Concern has also been expressed by others. It would be useful if the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth talked to a wide range of parents' organisations which have expressed the same concerns. The hon. Gentleman will have seen reports suggesting collusion in the system. It does not make for good inspection to have the potential for collusion within the system.

In our debate on new clause 1, the Secretary of State said that the local education authority would have a monopoly, as purchaser of the inspection team, as the employer. We must bear it in mind that HMI is in the system. It is independent and not employed by local education authorities. Its role is being changed substantially by the Bill. HMI is a source of independence and integrity.

There is a weakness in the argument of the Government of the Secretary of State. The Government argue that because the LEA is the employer, it will call the tune. However, if that is a flawed relationship, will not the same relationship exist in terms of the contractual relationship —and even more so? The team of inspectors will be dependent on a contract with the governing body for its inspection function. Because of the nature of business, the team will be looking for more work. If it does that, it will want to satisfy the governing bodies for which it is producing reports. In those circumstances, the relationship is more controlled and incestuous than the relationship with an individual local authority.

Mr. Enright: I want first to declare an interest as I belong to the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association and I express a specific view. In supporting new clause 2, the association is concerned that, as the Bill is drafted, there will be political control from the centre.

I was a teacher for 22 years and spent some time teaching in the west riding. My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) has already referred to the old west riding, which was Conservative-controlled. At that time, we were determined that we would not be controlled by politicians. When Wakefield metropolitan district council was Labour-controlled, we were equally concerned not to have political control. Will not control now directly pass to the Secretary of State for Education and Science? Have we not seen the disastrous results of his interference in the national curriculum? Would not the new clause give independence to the inspectorate?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend has made many valid points. He was right to refer to collusion in terms of the contractual relationship between the inspectorate team and the governing body. He is right to say that there is no guarantee of quality from the inspectorate. He must have looked at my notes to make his point about the constitutional importance of new clause 2, which is to preserve the independence and integrity of the inspectorate. My hon. Friend is assiduous in such matters, so he will be aware, unlike the Secretary of State, that clause 2(5) states:

> "In exercising his functions the Chief Inspector for England shall have regard to such aspects of government policy as the Secretary of State may direct."

That is a substantial power. If, as the Minister of State tried to pretend in Committee, the subsection does not mean "shall" but really means "may", why does the Bill not say that? The Bill states that the chief inspector, on a mandatory basis and under a mandatory responsibility, "shall have regard" to aspects of government policy. He "shall have regard" to the Secretary of State's whim, because the Secretary of State has very substantial directions.

The Bill does not give any flexibility. It talks simply in terms of a mandatory obligation upon the chief inspector. There is no freedom—the chief inspector will be fettered. Why is it so important that we try to limit the Secretary of State's fettering power? There are good arguments for limiting that power. For example—it is a general point, but it is an important constitutional point—we know from the Government's record that there seems to be a crucial criterion that they use in appointing people to senior public office. That criterion is simple—"Are you one of us? Do you support the Conservative party?"

The Minister of State looks surprised by that point. I sometimes wonder what a sheltered life he leads. If he ever left his garden and looked at what was going on in the world, he would understand the issues that take place. Let us consider the Government's appointments in the health service. This matter is very important to the integrity of the chief inspector. Each appointment seems to be vetted by Conservative central office. They are card-carrying members of the Conservative party. We have the atavistic element on the Conservative Back Benches. Conservative Back-Bench Members enjoy every party-political appointment. I warn them not that Labour will not do that in office but that Labour will have regard to the constitution. When Conservative Members behave in that way, they undermine the country's constitution.

Mr. Enright: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the Wakefield health authority district, democratic results gave only two seats to the Conservatives but that every appointment in the health authority area is a Conservative? Is not that a disgrace? Does not it give us cause to fear clause 5?

Mr. Fatchett: Again, my hon. Friend makes a valid point relating to new clause 2 and the method of appointment. We are trying to preserve the integrity of the chief inspector. My hon. Friend will know that, not too far from Wakefield, the chairman of one of the hospital trusts in Leeds, who is the largest private donator to the Tory party—a man who decided last week that he would use private medicine in the hospital trust that he manages—was yet another of those appointments.

You probably consider that my remarks are a little wide of the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but there has been a recent discussion about contextual factors in education. This is a contextual argument, which makes one understand the way in which the Government are prepared to make appointments for political reasons.

We know that from time to time, there has been a slight delay in publishing the HMI annual report. We also know that the Government are not reluctant to make it clear to those working on their behalf exactly what sort of political message they want to receive. There are real risks in that. I refer, for example, to a recent HMI report. My hon. Friends will be interested in this matter, because it is an HMI report on the first city technology college, Kingshurst, in Solihull in the west midlands. It is a creature of the Government, a college in which the Government have invested substantial money, and a college which, in the Government's terms, should be a success.

The independence of the inspectorate enabled it to make its comments, which is why new clause 2 is so relevant. On the Kingshurst CTC, it stated:

"On occasions, the lessons are undemanding."

On curriculum management, the inspectorate report stated:

"There is no co-ordination of the various aspects and strands that support the curriculum, nor are there effective links with the social education programme or with careers education and guidance."

In other words, a college had substantial Government money but was producing education standards that were not satisfactory to the inspectorate. I want an inspectorate to have the ability to make comments and criticisms and to be free of direct government interference.

Why have we decided to relate the responsibility and the duty to the national curriculum? We have linked back to the Education Reform Act 1988 for several reasons. There is broad acceptance of the principle of a national curriculum. It seems sensible for the inspectorate to maintain that national curriculum. There are certain characteristics that any national curriculum should have. It must be national and it must not be the plaything of any political party.

Mr. Pawsey: Hear, hear.

Mr. Fatchett: Yes. Over recent months, we have seen good evidence of a Secretary of State who is prepared to overturn independent expert advice in order to satisfy his own prejudices. We saw that in terms of history, and we recently saw it in terms of music, although he did a famous U-turn after his cage was rattled, I suspect. In those circumstances, we have seen party-political interference as represented by the idiosyncratic views of the Secretary of State.

We want a national curriculum which is above and beyond the suspicion of party politics. Above all, it must be a national curriculum that gives all our children a guaranteed entitlement to higher standards in education. That has been the Government's argument for a national curriculum—it has been broadly accepted—but we need a national curriculum that is secure and delivered by the inspectorate. We need an inspectorate that is powerful and independent and has a chief inspector who can make comments on aspects of Government policy, free from the interference of Education Ministers.

There are points on which my hon. Friends would like HMI to comment. For instance, they would like HMI to comment on the increase in class sizes in primary education, the scandal that one in four of our children are now taught in classes of 30 and over, and the fact that 10,000 of our children in primary education are taught in classes of 40 and more. We should like the inspector to comment on what those large classes do to the quality of education. A reading of the report of the so-called three wise men last week will show the difficulties in delivering key stage 1 and key stage 2 in very large classes.

I have no evidence to support it, but I suspect that Ministers looking for private schools for their children will not take as a key selling point class sizes of more than 35 or 40. They will be looking for smaller classes. We should like the inspector to comment on that point. We should also like the inspector to comment on the quality of our school buildings. We are faced with a backlog of £3·5 billion of school repairs. We need comment on that. We need to know what that does in terms of the quality of education and the standards of education for our children. They are legitimate matters. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) seems delighted to have children taught in substandard schools.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman did not hear what I said. I said that schools in my constituency are improving substantially under LMS.

7 pm

Mr. Fatchett: Clearly the hon. Lady does not understand LMS. Let me explain it to her. We may find that there is a substantial difference.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. This is not a Second Reading debate. Let us get a bit closer to the new clause.

Mr. Fatchett: I believe that this is close to the new clause, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Indeed, it is totally within it to talk about the fact that the inspector has a right to comment on the quality of school buildings and its impact on education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thought that the hon. Gentleman, for the benefit of the hon. Lady and the House, was going to explain LMS.

Mr. Fatchett: I appreciate that in that respect I was drifting out of order. I probably felt that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thought that the task was beyond my intellectual capacity. In the circumstances I was asking a great deal.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Surely the hon. Gentleman would expect an inspector commenting on school buildings to do so in proper context by drawing attention to the fact that deterioration, about which we are all concerned, has been prevalent for 40 or 50 years, and sometimes much longer. This is an historical situation that must be addressed by everybody.

Mr. Fatchett: That was an interesting intervention. The hon. Gentleman says that the problem has existed for 14 years.

Mr. Greenway: No, 40 or 50 years.

Mr. Fatchett: Ah, 40 or 50 years. I was about to remind the hon. Gentleman that the present Government have been in office for the past 13 years and therefore must accept a great deal of responsibility. I know that the hon. Gentleman has a considerable understanding of education issues and will realise that all the independent evidence suggests that the problems have worsened over the last few years. There is the problem of crumbling schools. Literally hundreds of thousands of children are taught in

[Mr. Fatchett]

substandard buildings. That must have direct effect on education standards, and it is legitimate that Her Majesty's inspectorate should comment on it.

I want the independent inspector to be able to comment on other aspects of Government policy. Whether the Government are Labour or Conservative, the inspector ought to have the right to comment, on, for instance, funding and on what is currently going on in the Prime Minister's county of Cambridgeshire, where there have been some very severe reductions. These must be matters for the inspector.

A report prepared by head teachers in Cambridgeshire and circulated to all county councillors comments on the impact of the £2 million cut in the county council's budget. It refers to the reduction in the number of teachers, to cuts in the provision for children with special educational needs, to larger classes, to cuts in the expenditure on books and equipment and to the national curriculum. The hon. Member for Lancaster will be interested to hear that it says that the national curriculum will not be delivered because of the difficulty——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It will be delivered in our schools.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Lady demonstrates the typically inward-looking Tory approach. She says that the national curriculum will be delivered in her schools. It does not seem to matter to her what will happen on the other side of the road. She is bothered only about what happens in Tory Lancashire. That is a quite legitimate interest, but surely what is going on in other parts of the country should be of interest to all of us. If we are to improve our general education standards we must have funding for the system and an inspectorate able to comment on that matter.

I know that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, take a keen interest in educational matters. If you look at other schools in Cambridgeshire, you will find cuts in physical education, technology, language assistance and music. All that is the result of the Government's funding policies, and an independent inspectorate has a right to comment on it.

An independent inspectorate would have a right to comment also on teacher supply and teacher shortage and on instances of classes being taught subjects in which the teachers are not qualified. The Minister of State does not see this as a legitimate area of concern for the inspectorate, but I do. It is an important matter. We know from an HMI report of last year that more than three quarters of our secondary schools are finding it difficult to deliver the national curriculum because they do not have properly qualified staff in every subject. This is a crucial difficulty.

We should be concerned not just about the number of teachers but about their quality. We should be concerned about whether a science teacher is available to teach a science lesson, or whether the only person available is someone trained over a very short period. We want an independent inspectorate that is able to comment on all those matters.

We want, above all else, a system of inspection that does not derive from ideology, that is not a quick fix, that does not represent a commitment to privatisation on the ground that the Department of Education and Science must deliver its element of privatisation. We want an education partnership between parents, schools, local authorities, industry and higher education—a partnership that will enable us to achieve standards comparable to those in the rest of western Europe. The only way we can achieve such standards is to have a chief inspector who is independent and free and who brings integrity to the partnership. That is why we have moved new clause 2.

Mr. Eggar: Before hearing the speech of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) I was going to say how much we had missed him in Committee. Having heard him speak, I can just about forgive him for not understanding the Committee debate. Indeed, he probably did not read the report of it. But there is something for which I have rather more difficulty in forgiving him. It is quite clear that he has failed to read not only the Bill and the report of the Committee's proceedings but his own party's policy document "Raising the Standard".

It is up to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to decide whether hon. Members are in order, but I must say that the hon. Gentleman went on at considerable length about matters some of which seemed to stray interestingly from the subject of the amendment. The hon. Gentleman spoke at some length about his desire for a totally independent inspectorate. If he had bothered to read his own party's policy document he would have seen that it is his party which seeks to deprive the inspectorate of its independence; that it is his party which is determined to put the inspectorate under the control of a new quango quaintly called the educational standards commission; that it is his party which would deprive Her Majesty's inspectorate of an essential part of what has given it independence and credibility—its role in advising the Secretary of State of the day.

I am not the first one to have criticised this side of the Labour party's proposals. The criticism came from the former senior chief inspector, Mr. Eric Bolton, who pointed out that, under Labour's proposals, the inspectorate, instead of advising the Secretary of State directly, would have to rely on the secondment of some senior inspectors. It must have been a considerable disappointment to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to hear Mr. Eric Bolton describe their proposals as "cloud cuckoo land".

To people who seek to follow the Labour party's proposals in this area I suggest that the new clause demonstrates very deep and very worrying confusion. Her Majesty's inspectorate—presumably still under the control of the education standards commission—would apparently have executive responsibilities. That is what the new clause suggests. The chief inspectors would be responsible for the curriculum in all schools. As well as supposedly advising the Secretary of State on policy and standards, they would take on the responsibilities of the Secretary of State, the local education authorities, the governors, the heads and the senior management of schools. For good measure, it appears that the inspector is meant also to advise in respect of a number of other matters, including resources.

I was interested that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central said nothing about the importance of separating inspection from advice. I recommend to him a good paragraph in "Raising the Standard":

> "We propose that every LEA should be placed under a legal duty to maintain a local inspectorate of schools, separate from any team of advisers or advisory teachers."

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central will recognise those words, and he should own up to them. The hon. Member

for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara)—whom I welcome to the Chamber—missed that point in Committee, where we enjoyed the confusion that reigned on the Opposition Benches in respect of this issue.

Although one can understand the Opposition having difficulty with their own Back Benchers, I never expected that they would have difficulty with members of their own Front Bench. It is no use the hon. Member for Leeds, Central looking to either side of him; he is the guilty man. In a document that has conveniently been leaked to me, the hon. Gentleman, without any hesitation, contradicts the words of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in "Raising the Standard". I refer to a letter written by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central on 28 November 1991 to the secretary of the Society of Chief Inspectors and Advisers:

> "The subsequent evaluation, monitoring and implementation of new practices could be carried out by both the initial inspector or by a group of advisers. At this point, whilst we define separately the responsibility of inspection and advice we also recognise that in certain circumstances approved by the LEA and the Education Standards Commission inspection and advice could be offered by the same group of people."

That is directly contrary to what was stated in "Raising the Standard" and to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Blackburn from the Opposition Front Bench in Committee.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Blackburn is not here to set the hon. Member for Leeds, Central right. I would welcome an intervention from the hon. Gentleman to explain whether Labour's policy is that described in "Raising the Standard" or that stated by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central in his letter to the Society of Chief Inspectors and Advisers. I suspect that the Opposition are in the same muddle on this as on every other issue—including taxation, over the past three weeks.

If the Opposition Front Bench cannot get its act together, how can we believe that they want to introduce effective inspection? New clause 2 is humbug. It clearly exposes the weakness that is at the heart of Labour's inspection policy, and demonstrates that the hon. Member for Blackburn does not speak to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central.

Mr. Fatchett: It is flattering of the Government to spend so much time on Labour's proposals. There is a growing consensus, which the Minister is prepared to support, that there will be a Labour Government before too long—when our proposals will be implemented.

It is characteristic of the Government that although the Minister spoke for one quarter of an hour, he did not once refer to new clause 2 or defend the Government's record. That is typical of the Government's tactics and negative approach.

The Minister called the new clause "humbug". If he regards the inspectorate's independence and integrity as humbug, he is not fit to serve as Minister of State. We are not satisfied with the Minister's response and will divide the House on new clause 2.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—*The Committee divided:* Ayes, 203, Noes 285.

Division No. 60] **[7.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce

Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'ts)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Sir Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John

Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 3

Power of Chief Inspector for England to promote studies for improving efficiency etc.

"The Chief Inspector for England may, with the consent of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, promote or undertake studies in connection with his functions designed to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in England.'.—*[Mr. Straw.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Straw: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: New Clause 4—*Power of Chief Inspector for Wales to promote studies for improving efficiency etc.*—

"The Chief Inspector for Wales may, with the consent of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, promote or undertake studies in connection with his functions designed to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in Wales.'.

Government amendments Nos. 26, 27, 48 and 49.

Mr. Straw: I am sure that the House is pleased that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), is to answer the debate. It may explain why scores of hon. Members are trying to get into the Chamber.

Mr. George Howarth: It is the other way round.

Mr. Straw: One of the problems with the *Official Report* is that heavy irony usually fails to come off, and it certainly did on that occasion.

New clause 3 proposes to add to the Bill the following:

"The Chief Inspector for England may, with the consent of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, promote or undertake studies in connection with his functions designed to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in England."

Clause 4 has the same wording, except that it applies to the chief inspector for Wales.

7.30 pm

Amendments Nos. 26 and 27 appear on page 412 of the amendment sheet. We need not worry about No. 26 because it simply deletes the word "and". Amendment No. 27 proposes to insert in clause 16, at the end of the two sets of criteria, the words:

"assist in assessing the degree of efficiency with which the financial resources of those schools are managed."

Government amendments Nos. 48 and 49, which can be found on page 413, do the same in respect of clause 17 and the exercise of functions in Scotland.

In Committee there were substantial debates about how far the effectiveness of schools could fairly be judged simply by the publication of crude raw data on their results. We shall deal with that later.

New clause 3 touches on those issues because it proposes that, after consultation with the Audit Commission, the chief inspector ought to be able to

"undertake studies in connection with his functions . . . to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools".

It would be difficult for us to object to Government amendments Nos. 26 and 27 since, as I recall, they arose from amendments that we tabled in Committee. Thus, we do not object—it would be churlish to do so.

Amendment No. 27 is concerned only with assessing the degree of efficiency with which a school's financial resources are managed. The Chief Inspector ought to be able to study wider criteria. Obviously efficiency is important, but he should also consider economy and effectiveness.

The Audit Commission provides an important model of how Government institutions, which are there to monitor the work of public services, should work. I pay tribute to the Audit Commission's work in the 10 years or so since it was first established. Under the leadership of the first controller, John Banham, and more recently under the leadership of the present controller, Howard Davies, the Audit Commission has achieved the enviable position of being respected by both central and local government, by the health authorities and by the public, who view it as a body which will rigorously assess, scrutinise and seek to monitor the effectiveness of public services on their behalf. Interestingly, the model offered by the Audit Commission in respect of auditing the accounts of local authorities and health authorities is wholly at variance with the scheme of the Bill.

My hon. Friends will recall that I asked the Secretary of State, not once but three times, if he could name one area of public services where such a crackpot scheme had been introduced as the privatisation of the schools inspectorate and allowing the provider to pick and pay the regulator.

I am glad to see the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) in the Chamber. He is the only Conservative member of the Standing Committee—apart from the hired hands on the second row—in his place. Indeed, he is the only Conservative member of the Standing Committee who has taken any part in the debate. Although he is not a hired hand—in the sense that the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) is—he holds the esteemed position of chairman of the parliamentary Conservative party education committee, so it is his duty to be here. The fact that the other Conservative members of the Committee listened to the debates hour after hour but cannot bring themselves to come into the Chamber today, let alone speak in support of the measure, shows how bankrupt their argument is.

Mr. Pawsey: It is not duty which brings me here, but pleasure—the pleasure of hearing my right hon. and hon. Friends demolishing the Opposition's arguments.

Mr. Straw: I suspect that that pleasure will be long delayed.

Mr. Pawsey: Yes, I suspect that it will be.

Mr. Straw: The curiosity of the Bill is that it has no parallel in public administration here or elsewhere in the world. I do not think that anyone in the western industrialised world or the developing world has ever dreamed up such a madcap scheme as allowing schools to

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pick and pay inspectors. At least the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth has the good grace to smile—perhaps with some acquiescence—at what I am saying.

The interesting thing about the Audit Commission is that its method of operation is different from that proposed in the Bill. It is fascinating that the Audit Commission was established by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) when he was last Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): First.

Mr. Straw: Yes, it was when he was first Secretary of State for the Environment. Now he is their last Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Audit Commission was established in 1981-82 because of worries about inconsistent standards in the inspection of local authorities' accounts. One of the main concerns of the Government and the public at that stage was that local authorities were allowed to pick and pay their auditors. It was the main objection to that system of inspection. The right hon. Member for Henley said in the House at the time that it was crucially important that not only should the auditing of local authorities be independent, but that it should be seen to be independent. Rather than allow local authorities to decide, the Audit Commission was given powers, under its enabling legislation, to determine who should audit their accounts. Some local authorities objected to the fact that their right to decide was to be taken away.

I happen to think that that was the correct decision. It was also entirely consistent with the Conservative Administration's approach of the past 13 years to the auditing and regulation of public services. However, the Secretary of State for Education and Science had a brainstorm in the summer after reading the draft pamphlet produced by the Wandsworth chief inspector and immediately introduced the Bill. I believe that he did so in the hope, if not the expectation, of an October election so that the Bill would never see the light of legislative day. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has had to rue the fact that we prevented the Government from calling an election in November. Now he must deliver the Bill.

Mr. Fallon: We could have the election now.

Mr. Straw: We would be delighted, but the last person who would want an election now must be the hon. Gentleman as one of the certainties of that election is that he will not represent Darlington after it, especially in view of the way in which he has so gratuitously offended Catholics in his constituency.

Mr. Fallon: I have not offended anyone in my constituency. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recall that, in the past, the Labour party underestimated the Darlington electorate.

Mr. Straw: Once bitten, twice shy. I am sorry to say that it is a racing certainty——

Mr. Fatchett: Do not apologise for it.

Mr. Straw: Again, that remark is full of deep irony. It is a racing certainty that the Under-Secretary of State will not represent Darlington after the election.

Some of us believe that the hon. Gentleman's approach to politics in the past year has been dictated by a desire to secure a safe seat somewhere else rather than by concern for his constituents in Darlington. Only someone who had already decided to abandon his constituents would so offend a large number of them, the Catholic population. The hon. Gentleman has thrown his seat away.

Mr. Fatchett: What has he done?

Mr. Straw: I do not believe that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a stickler for order, would wish me to pursue that. I must relate my remarks to the Audit Commission.

Mr. Fatchett: It might be a serious matter.

Mr. Straw: It might indeed, but it has nothing to do with the Audit Commission. I know that the Under-Secretary of State has offended a lot of people, but I am not aware, as yet, that he has offended the Audit Commission. In any case the commission has a broader back and no votes—unlike the Catholic population of Darlington.

As a result of the local government legislation of 1982, the Audit Commission and not the local authorities appoints the auditors to local authorities. The Audit Commission also appoints the auditors for the health authorities and even the opt-out hospital trusts. Earlier, the Secretary of State wriggled and wriggled on that parallel, but it is well known that those trusts sought to argue that, as they were semi-privatised, they should have the right to appoint their own auditors, as though they were the shareholders of their trusts' property. One can appreciate the argument, given how detached they are from the health service. However, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was Secretary of State for Health, he insisted that the Audit Commission should appoint the auditors to the opt-out trusts.

It is true that for the audit of local authorities the Audit Commission uses not only the district auditor service but a number of private audit companies. Conservative Members could have used that fact as an argument for saying that, with the system of audit of local authority accounts, the Audit Commission offers a parallel to the proposed privatised inspection regime.

The important difference is that the Audit Commission uses only seven or eight firms of auditors. Those firms are carefully controlled and regulated by the commission, not by the local authorities. The crucial difference between the scheme proposed in the Bill and that operated by the Audit Commission is that it is the Audit Commission which pays the fees of those firms. The Audit Commission chooses those firms and, on behalf of the public, ensures that they do the job.

Mr. George Howarth: He who pays the piper.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend with his usual sagacity—I could have used other words—has put his finger on it; he who pays the piper calls the tune.

I believe that the Bill will be defeated by the fact that the Government and the Opposition will run out of time——

Mr. Fatchett: And by the electorate.

7.45 pm

Mr. Straw: That goes without saying, including the electorate of Darlington.

Part of the Opposition's function is to try to improve legislation even if we do not agree with the principles behind it. In the unlikely event of the scheme coming into effect, I hope that the senior chief inspector would be able to draw upon the experience of the Audit Commission by seeking to judge in a wider sense the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the management of schools.

The Audit Commission began the serious scrutiny of the work of the local inspectorate with its excellent report, "Assuring Quality of Education", published in 1989. The Secretary of State flies so many canards that it is difficult to know where to start in terms of correcting him. However, one of the many inaccuracies that he has uttered —he usually does so when he has nothing better to say —is to suggest that our proposals for an education standards commission were hastily put together when we heard about the citizens charter.

I am glad to note that the Secretary of State has now taken his place on the Front Bench. I accept that it is a well-known political truth that if one side of the House finds out what the other side is doing it sometimes tries to take pre-emptive action. However, our discussions about the education standards commission predate any hint or suggestion of a parents charter or a citizens charter.

We proposed an education standards council, as it was first called, as policy to the Labour party conference in 1988. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will agree that that predates the parents charter. We published a document on our proposals in May 1989, which predated the Audit Commission proposal. However, when that proposal was published, we studied it in detail.

The Audit Commission has an obvious interest in the running of the local inspectorate. Although the Audit Commission report spelled out the steps that local authorities needed to take, it did not, at any stage, suggest that the inspectorate should be privatised.

Recently the Audit Commission published a working paper entitled "Two Bs or not . . . ", which is an important study of the performance of schools and colleges at A-level. We shall consider some of the main conclusions of that report when we discuss school effectiveness. However, that report revealed that it is silly to seek to judge institutions simply on the absolute level of results that they achieve. They are an important starting point for judging how schools and colleges are proceeding, but they cannot be the finishing point, any more than, as any accountant knows, the only basis for judging the financial soundness of a company is the total amount of its sales. That is a received wisdom among Conservative Members, but we have moved on from that method of judging the effectiveness of companies to much more sophisticated techniques that tell us how much value added they produce and how much work they do.

Similarly, the Audit Commission, a number of whose officers work in education, decided to look not just at crude results but at the attainment of young people in sixth forms, sixth form further education and tertiary colleges, and private schools. It compared their GCSE attainment when they entered those institutions with their A-level attainment when they left and sought to judge from those results the effectiveness of those institutions.

I am glad to welcome to the Government Front Bench the Minister of State, Welsh Office, the right hon. Member for Conwy (Sir W. Roberts), who is the longest serving Minister in the same post in this Parliament and whose record can scarcely be exceeded by anyone this century. I hope that I shall not ruin his chances at the general election by saying that I have always had considerable affection for him. I am glad to see that he is here, because the debate also concerns Wales.

The results that the Audit Commission found were interesting. They showed that the GCSE results of young people in the middle of the range were better in independent schools but that independent schools did worse in terms of those with a lower attainment and, at the top, had average results. Those results were important in focusing on what makes institutions effective and in debunking some of the myths about the performance of such institutions.

I hope that, in explaining the background to the proposal and the Audit Commission's work, I may have persuaded the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) that he could easily accept the amendment. It would help to strengthen the work of the chief inspector of schools, as the Government wish.

New clause 3 says that the chief inspector should, with the consent of the Audit Commission, be able to undertake studies. It is important tht he should be able to carry out research into what is going on because the difficulty of the Government's scheme is that the main source of data on what happens in schools would come from inspections carried out by privatised inspectors.

May I put on record the fact that there is now no Conservative Member left in the Chamber apart from Ministers? Although this is supposed to be a flagship policy, no Conservative Member is here to support the Government—*[Interruption.]* A Conservative Member is now scampering on to the Benches. We look forward to her contribution to the debate. The Bill is a Government measure and it is for Conservative Members to argue in favour of it. It is noteworthy that Conservative Members have not volunteered press statements or speeches in support of the privatisation of the inspectorate. Their silence is deafening.

When the Prime Minister was trying to relaunch the beached citizens charter the other day, as to how central the privatised, pick-and-pay, pick-your-own inspectorate would be within the parents charter or the citizens charter, there was virtual silence. The Prime Minister's apparent scepticism and distaste for the measure is plainly shared by most Conservative Members, who have shown their unhappiness about the measure by leaving the Chamber.

Mr. McFall: To add substance to my hon. Friend's remarks, early-day motion 574, signed by six Conservative Members, deplores the action of Labour Members and asks them to clarify their position during the Report stage of the Bill. Where are those six Conservative Members? The fact that they are not here illustrates the vacuousness of their position and the fact that they are not interested in the Bill. Those interested in the rights of parents are the Labour Members who are present to debate the issue.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. One or two Conservative Members are interested in those issues. The Secretary of State dealt neither fairly nor with the respect that they deserved with the points raised by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), who made an important contribution to the debate on the rights of local authorities. One can never accuse those Conservative

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Members of being in the pocket of the left-wing educational establishment. The Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Darlington, may do so, but I certainly would not.

Those Conservative Members are concerned with ensuring that consistent standards of education are maintained in their constituencies. They know that removing a local authority's power to inspect schools in the period between the privatised inspections that will take place evry four years and refusing to provide the local authority with the money to pay for inspectors will mean that schools that fall below standard between inspections —arithmetically, schools will probably not fall below standard exactly at the point of inspection, but problems will arise at other times—will go unmonitored and standards will fall further under the so-called parents charter, which represents declining standards and mediocrity.

The Government claim that the main data that will flow to Her Majesty's chief inspector, from which he will judge the state of the education service, will be derived from individual inspections.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman is filibustering.

Mr. Straw: I am not filibustering. This debate is raising important issues. In the previous debate, many Conservative Members were as unhappy with the Government's proposals as we were. They were certainly unconvinced by the Secretary of State.

The Government claim that the main source of data will be individual reports from the privatised inspectorates. We believe that those individual reports are bound to be of an inconsistent standard, for the reasons that the Minister of State admitted in the Standing Committee. Governing bodies will be able to pick and choose inspectors who follow their approach.

The Minister of State also made the damaging admission that, if a school was following an integrationist approach, for example on special needs, it could appoint inspectors without expertise in that subject. Therefore, there will be no consistency in the standard of information and, even if there were, it would still need to be backed up by nationwide studies such as those undertaken until now by the Audit Commission in its relatively narrow field and which HMI and organisations such as the Assessment of Performance Unit used to undertake until it was abolished.

Mr. George Howarth: I have been listening carefully to my hon. Friend and it is clear from his detailed analysis of all the implications of the process that it will be disastrous. In Committee the Government heard all the criticisms being made. In my hon. Friend's opinion, why are the Government carrying on with the Bill? Are there sinister reasons for it?

Mr. Straw: I think that the Government have got themselves stuck. I believe that Conservative Members wish for an early election if only to see the end of the Bill.

The Secretary of State has a history of introducing measures and then changing his mind. He did so with the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill that he brought before the House in November 1990. He commended it in fulsome terms and said that he agreed not only with the Bill but with his hon. Friend's comments. Then, hey hoe, about two months later the matter is turned on its head and the Secretary of State says that he does not agree with a word of it and introduces a different measure. That is on the record and the Secretary of State had clearly not thought his position through and so had to change his mind. He could easily do the same on this Bill; if he did, we would applaud his action.

8 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): We spent about 300 hours discussing the so-called Education Reform Bill. I alluded to it as a "deform" Bill. The Government thought through that Bill with such urgency that it was almost doubled in size by Government amendments. Endless Government amendments had to be introduced before the Bill could be made to work. The present Education (Schools) Bill is also being rushed through at such a rate that people are not conversant with what is happening. However, the Government will not accept one Opposition amendment out of hundreds, but every now and then Ministers say that there is not much difference between the views of the parties.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend brings experience and wisdom on educational matters to the House. It is no good the Secretary of State going on about the need to keep the pace of change going. Change is in the nature of life, but our charge against the Government is that they have failed to think through their changes and have then mismanaged them.

It is known—perhaps the Secretary of State will wake up to this fact at some stage—that our 1987 manifesto contained a proposal for a national core curriculum which we would have introduced had we won the election. We did not oppose the principle of a national curriculum in 1987 and we are not undergoing a latter-day conversion, but we certainly depart from the way in which the Government have put the national curriculum into practice. They have failed to think the matter through, and consequently one change after another has been imposed on schools. Some 165 separate documents have been sent to schools—more than one for each week of every term since the Education Reform Act 1988 has been in force.

Before I was interrupted, I was saying that we believe that—*[Interruption.]* Sometimes one feels bound, out of deference to colleagues to allow interventions from hon. Friends. We think that there is a strong case for studies, as well as receiving information and making judgments on the basis of the local inspection reports.

Mr. Fallon: The House will have listened to the most extraordinarily discursive speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) which started with mention of Darlington. I must correct what he said—I have provided £243,000 for Church schools in Darlington but the Labour-controlled Durham county council is threatening to refuse to spend any of that money on Catholic schools there, and I shall hold the council to account.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): The Minister has just given the House—I shall not say "deliberately" —some misinformation. Durham county council, in consultation with the Department of Education and Science, proposed extra accommodation for Catholic

schools. The Minister turned it down—the people of Darlington know that and the Catholics will remember it at the general election.

Mr. Fallon: I have made it clear that I provided £250,000 for Church schools in Darlington—*[Interruption.]*—personally. Durham county council is threatening to withhold that money from schools in Darlington—I think that the people of Darlington will clearly understand that.

The hon. Member for Blackburn attempted to explain the Government amendments in this group, but I shall do that myself later. New clauses 3 and 4 are wholly inappropriate. They would not add anything to the powers of the chief inspectors. Instead, the amendments would reduce their ability to act as they see fit. The clauses may appear to give a function to the chief inspector. They state that he may, in connection with his functions, arrange studies into how schools might be more efficiently, economically and effectively managed. However, nothing in the Bill as drafted would prevent him from doing this, if he so chose.

The clauses add nothing to the powers of the HMCIs for England and Wales in this respect. The clauses would reduce the ability of the HMCIs to follow their own independent judgment in carrying out such studies. They would be required to obtain the consent of the Audit Commission before they could act as laid down. That is unacceptable, and quite out of keeping with the increased independence we are seeking for the HMCI.

I expect that in practice HMCI and the Audit Commission will carry on and develop the relationship which HMI and the commission have already established. The House may not fully appreciate that there is already considerable co-operation between the Audit Commission and HMI. A number of HMIs have been seconded to the commission's staff in recent years, and such individuals have been involved in several published reports on educational matters, including that on local authority inspection and, more recently, on management in primary schools. At present, the commission and HMI are carrying out joint exercises looking at 16-to-19 education and special educational needs. They are co-operating on work in performance indicators which will be relevant for the implementation of both this and the Local Government Bill.

I fully accept that the Audit Commission's experience and expertise are relevant to those parts of HMI's functions which have to do with efficiency and value for money in schools. It is equally true that HMI's experience and expertise are relevant to that part of the Audit Commission's work which has to do with education. I am sure that co-operation will increase under the new legislation. I am sure, for example, that HMCI will want to talk to the Commission about relevant aspects of his guidance to registered inspectors. But I am sure we can rely on HMCI and the Audit Commission to achieve that, and do not need to give their relationship the backing of statute.

I do not see any difficulty in the two bodies continuing to work alongside each other as now, both with their separate remits. The Local Government Bill now before Parliament gives the Audit Commission new powers to require the publication of performance information covering local authority services including education. The Education (Schools) Bill gives a formal basis for HMI's increasing interest in the efficiency with which resources are used in schools. It will be essential, as now, for the two bodies to co-operate and consult as they carry out their duties. But I see no reason for that to be set out in law—and certainly not for HMCI to be made subordinate to the Audit Commission in that respect.

That must have been the original view of the hon. Member for Blackburn. Paragraph 64 of his document "Raising the Standard" states:

> "There should be consultation between the ESC and the Audit Commission about the transfer of appropriate staff and about where the dividing line between the work of the two Commissions should be precisely drawn."

That is a far cry from new clause 3, which would impose in statute the subordination of the HMI to the Audit Commission.

It is clear that the hon. Gentleman is making this up as he goes along. It seems that he drafted the new clause on the back of an envelope during a delayed railway journey between Blackburn and London when he had forgotten what was set out in "Raising the Standard". It is not often that we praise "Raising the Standard", but we think that he had it right before he scribbled new clause 3.

There will, of course, be consultation between the two bodies. They will work out between them precisely where the dividing line should lie.

To show that we are not opposed to improvements to the Bill in the cause of encouraging efficiency, I commend Government amendments Nos. 26 and 27 and the corresponding amendments, Nos. 48 and 49, for Scotland. These amendments meet a point that was urged upon us by Opposition Members in Committee, which we undertook to consider further. It appears that the powers in clauses 16 and 17 do not extend to the collection and publication of information about efficiency in schools. That is a gap. When indicators are available through the work of HMI and the commission, we want to be able to include them in relevant publications. Inspection reports will cover quality, standards and efficiency, and so, as far as possible, should other publications.

I hope that the Opposition, on reconsidering the merits of their new clauses, will be able to give their full support to the Government amendments, which are designed to bridge a gap in the Bill to which they, the Opposition, drew our attention in Committee. Accordingly, I hope that new clauses 3 and 4 will be withdrawn and that Government amendments Nos. 26, 27, 48 and 49 will be accepted.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, North): I listened with interest to the Minister's response. It astounds me that the Government still do not understand, after the decade of disturbance that they have caused within the education system, that they are responsible for a veritable blizzard of "innovation". Whenever I speak on this subject I find myself searching for new and more adequate ways of describing what the Government have done. I have used various words, such as storm, wave and carousel, and tonight I have opted for blizzard. I feel for our hard-pressed teachers, who have the unenviable task of delivering education to our children in the face of the blizzard of "innovation".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has said, the pace of change is astounding. There is at least an administrative circular each day. One can imagine the amount of time that head teachers and teachers must spend reading the literature that is produced by the Government. It is no wonder that they have not

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caught up with one change before they are overtaken by the next. It is not surprising that there is a crisis of morale in the teaching profession. The Government have failed to recognise the crisis but it has been researched. Warwick university undertook a study and concentrated especially on those who teach pupils of seven years and over.

8.15 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret that the hon. Member is straying and I must draw his attention to the new clauses that we are considering. I invite him to address his remarks more specifically to them.

Mr. O'Hara: I shall do so, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am setting out the background to the new clauses. I have drawn attention to the crisis of morale among those who deliver education to our children. It has arisen because of the constant disturbance that they suffer in undertaking their task.

In deference to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall refer more briefly to the difficulties that face local authorities in managing their budgets as a result of the changes that the Government are introducing and the cuts that are being inflicted on local authority spending. The problems that are experienced in the local management of schools are shared by the schools themselves and local authorities. They are trying to share a cake that is too small to meet demand.

Surely the most pressing need is a period of consultation within the education system. We need a period of review and overview. We need to stand back and assess whether we are moving forward or merely spinning round and getting nowhere fast. We must determine whether we are moving fast but ineffectively.

For example, how much time are teachers able to devote to teaching? I have referred to the time that they must spend reading Government circulars. They have to spend time preparing and testing. Studies have shown that teachers of seven-year-olds are spending only about 42 per cent. of their time teaching. The rest of their time is devoted to other duties.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret having again to call the hon. Member's attention to the new clauses that are before us. The hon. Member has excellent parliamentary manners and I have never known him attempt to abuse the House in any way. I must ask him to convince me that he is speaking to the clauses, which relate to the powers of the chief inspectors for England and for Wales. He must address himself to the substantive matters that are set out in the new clauses.

Mr. O'Hara: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I assure you that all my remarks are relevant to the new clauses. New clause 3 states:

"The Chief Inspector for England may, with the consent of the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, promote or undertake studies in connection with his functions designed to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in England."

If an overview, initiated by HMI in consultation with the Audit Commission, of the way in which teachers are spending their time in schools is not an examination of "efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in England", I do not know what is. What more expensive resource is there in this context than staffing costs? I am sure that we all want as much as possible of the money that is allocated to be spent on the teaching of children. There has been some limited research, but there is a crying need for the sort of study to which HMI has drawn attention repeatedly during its distinguished history. It is surely the best-equipped organisation to carry out that study.

We are told repeatedly when we complain about the allocation of resources to local authorities that they have surplus places in their schools and that if they were more efficient in eliminating them they would be able to allocate their resources more efficiently. Surplus places are not just a matter of space, not just a matter of square metres. There can be many reasons why surplus places cannot be taken out. For example, they may be on the wrong side of the main road. In the case of Church schools, of which I have a large number in my constituency, surplus places do not match conveniently the parish boundaries.

There is an educational as well as a financial dimension to the problem of surplus places. I hope that I have convinced you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that new clause 3 would enable the chief inspector for England, in consultation with the Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England and Wales, to carry out such a study. Therefore, the two new clauses should be accepted so that tasks that Her Majesty's inspectorate are well suited to carry out can be carried out in the interests of good and efficiently provided education.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): The two new clauses are particularly to be welcomed, not least at a time when entirely misconceived proposals are being considered by the Conservative-controlled Brent borough council. They seem to be designed to close down schools in the southern part of the borough. I congratulate my Front-Bench colleagues on introducing the two new clauses. Some of my constituents have written to me only recently. One of those letters was written by Mr. Peter Herson of 73 Fortune Gate road, Harlesden, NW10. He writes with good cause about his concern, and that of many other parents who are in a similar position, about the public consultation document "Primary School Provision in Brent" that was recently published by the council.

If new clause 3 were to be given a Second Reading by the House, it would be possible to have an independent audit. Newfield school, like similar schools, is delivering the goods in terms of the quality of the education that it provides to pupils in my constituency. It has won praise from the inspectorate. It is geared to achieving the highest standards while at the same time ensuring efficient and cost-effective use of resources. That school is now threatened with closure.

I am opposed to the closure of Newfield school. The overwhelming majority of parents in my constituency who send their children to that threatened school are also opposed to its closure. They would welcome an independent report that would show just how well resources are being used in that school and just how well the needs and concerns of parents about the educational welfare of their children are being met.

It does not end there. The consultation document is misconceived. The Conservative chairman of the education committee, Mrs. Elisabeth Ormiston, has acted not like a bull in a china shop——

Mr. Pawsey: A heifer?

Mr. Paul Boateng: No. I do not intend to go down the road that the hon. Gentleman urges me to go down. However, that lady acts like someone who has not considered the consequences of her actions. She has shown a singular lack of sensitivity in her approach to her job and in her willingness to close schools, regardless of the quality of education that they provide.

My borough is particularly proud of its standards of primary school education. They are being achieved despite the lamentable lack of financial support, at times, from the Department of Education and Science and the Department of the Environment, and despite the lamentable politicisation of education, spearheaded by the Conservative group on Brent borough council which is determined to take its lead from Conservative Members of Parliament and to engage in an absolutely deplorable form of social experimentation when it comes to the education of my constituents' children. We are sick and tired of——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not seek to breach our procedures or our Standing Orders. What he says is very interesting, but as far as I can see it does not relate to the new clauses that we are considering. May I ask him to relate what he has to say to the two new clauses, which I know he is interested in? Furthermore, we want to hear his views on them.

Mr. Boateng: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was seeking to address my remarks precisely to new clause 3. Its value to the pupils and parents of Newfield school and Chamberlayne Wood school—also threatened with closure, which will be overwhelmingly opposed by the majority of parents in the borough who, particularly in the southern part, seek to exercise the widest possible choice and to make wise choices for their children—is that it would then be possible for an independent review to be carried out of the education provided for those children.

Mr. Fallon: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument on new clause 3. Is it his position, and that of the Opposition generally, that the chief inspector for England, as proposed in the Bill—or his equivalent, as proposed by the Opposition—should have the power to intervene over the provision of school places and the proposal to remove surplus places? Does he want the chief inspector to have the power to challenge the decision of local education authorities?

Mr. Boateng: I have no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) has made it clear that that is not the case.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Lady has not spoken yet on this new clause.

Mr. Boateng: If my hon. Friend has not yet made that clear, I am sure that she will do so shortly, which will allay any suspicion that may linger in the mind of the hon. Gentleman as to our intentions.

Ms. Armstrong: I am amazed by the Minister's intervention. The Government's proposals for opting out have distorted the surplus places issue. What has happened in Brent is partly due to the idiotic policies that the Government have pursued. There are far more surplus places now than at any other time. That has come about specifically because of the way that the Government have frozen proper reorganisation. We want a reorganisation that will provide parents with proper rights of consultation and independent rights of consultation. Again he cannot read. We produced another document on this last year and I invite him to read that. It deals specifically with the reorganisation of schools.

Mr. Pawsey: What is it called?

Ms. Armstrong: Off the top of my head, I cannot remember. *[Interruption.]* I do not understand why that should be an issue for derision. I cannot remember the name of every document. The document deals with reorganising schools properly in a way that would give an independent right of appeal to anyone with an interest in the school, be that person a parent, a governor or any member of the community.

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will now relate his remarks to the new clause.

8.30 pm

Mr. Boateng: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am much obliged to my hon. Friend for her helpful intervention. The Minister mentioned surplus places and I am only too happy to respond. I am concerned particularly about Newfield school. The position there emphasises the point made by my hon. Friend about the importance of consultation.

Newfield school's actual capacity is 201. In the consultation document issued recently in my borough its capacity is determined, wrongly, by the architects as 243. At present the school has 173 pupils in six classes, which leaves just one surplus place per class. Should a new family move into the area, with three children all of primary age, without the spare capacity Newfield school could not offer them all places. That is why we welcome the new clause.

Mr. Fallon *rose*——

Mr. Boateng: The Minister will have his opportunity in a moment.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to eat his dinner while sitting on the Front Bench?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not see any hon. Members having dinner or any form of refreshment. If they were, perhaps they would offer some to me.

Mr. Boateng: Whatever the Minister is chewing, it is as indigestible as the Bill that we are considering.

Mr. Fallon *rose*——

Mr. Boateng: In due course, please.

What I and my constituents are concerned about is that the chief inspector for England may promote studies to improve efficiency. With the consent of the Audit Commission he should be able to

"undertake studies in connection with his functions designed to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in England."

Such studies would be welcomed warmly by the governors and teachers of Newfield junior, middle, and infant school which is threatened with closure. They would also be

[Mr. Boateng]

welcomed by the parents, governors and staff of Chamberlayne Wood school, another school threatened with closure.

It does not end there. In being able to exercise those functions, the chief inspector could also draw the attention not only of my local authority but of local authorities throughout the country to the good work being done in William Gladstone school, yet another school in the London borough of Brent, under Conservative control, which is threatened with closure. Overwhelmingly among staff, parents and in the constituency there is opposition to closure.

Before sitting down, I invite the Minister to meet me and other hon. Members who are concerned about the reorganisation of primary education in my borough and about the closure of William Gladstone school. Excellent work is being done in primary schools in the borough of Brent and in William Gladstone school. That work would contribute to the study which the chief inspector would have power to make under new clause 3. We should like the opportunity to make representations to the Minister. Will he meet us to discuss the problems of primary schools in Brent and of William Gladstone school, which is also facing closure? That is a challenge to the Minister; I look forward to him taking it up.

Mr. Flannery: New clause 3 is the same as new clause 4 except that it applies to England while new clause 4 applies to Wales. We have all met chief inspectors at various times. At that level the inspectorate is very much an independent body. Anything that would destroy its independence is alien to education. The inspectorate can say whatever it wishes, in an honourable way, to try to bring about changes not only in schools but in the organisational groupings which deal with schools.

Independent reports began only a few years ago. To his credit, it was a Conservative Minister who introduced them. Those reports can be uncomfortable for a Government and for an Opposition. We want enough money for the inspectorate to promote or undertake studies. What does that mean? It means that the inspectorate could initiate courses to try to do something about what is happening in schools. When we want the chief inspector to undertake work

"in connection with his functions designed to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness",

we mean that schools should be used at weekends to provide in-service training.

In our city we had a teachers' centre. Not as an architect, but as a teacher, I was one of the people who planned it. It was one of the first. Some of us travelled the country to try to find out about it. It was in Melbourne house. In fact, it was outside there that the ripper was caught. We were very worried because many women teachers went along a rather dark road to the teachers' centre.

That teachers' centre has gone. it is now part of the girls' high school, a private school. The school has enough money to keep it going, but we had not. As a result we have lost the in-service training and teachers' meetings which took place there. I hope that, as a result of inspections and discussions, an inspector, independent of the Government, would be disturbed about that. I hope that, if that were brought to the notice of a chief inspector, he would want to initiate studies into what was happening to teachers' centres throughout Britain. Such studies would induce efficiency and promote economy. It is necessary for us to have teachers who are surplus to immediate requirements in schools to free other teachers to go to the teachers' centres and similar places to study education further.

The Scottish system of education is wholly different from ours. It is a very fine system and I hope that one day the two systems will come much closer together. The National Union of Teachers in England and the Educational Institute of Scotland are close to each other already.

Mr. O'Hara: Does my hon. Friend agree that another study might concern a subject of topical interest—the seven-plus test? HMI would be well placed to carry out a long-term study of the experience of nursery education and its effect on children's progress to assessment at age seven and further up the age range.

Mr. Flannery: I am sure that such a study would be one of many that would improve "efficiency, economy and effectiveness" in the education system. During my lifetime in teaching, the task of the inspectorate has been to bring to the notice of Governments in a civilised way how they can promote efficiency in the schools by whatever methods, and how they can initiate methods, including the teacher at the chalk face, to make our system better. That is why we tabled new clauses 3 and 4.

The new clauses would give the chief inspector himself or herself—I hope that one day it will be herself—the power to initiate research on aspects of education which he or she deems to be worthy of such attention. Although the aim is to promote economy, such research requires money. Education cannot be done on the cheap, and nobody knows that better than HM inspectorate.

I have met HM inspectors on many occasions and have found them a most civilised group. Teachers have found that the breadth of their approach to education has often contrasted with that of the local inspectors who, no matter how willing and able, do not have the knowledge of HM inspectors who travel round the whole country. Inspection must be intended primarily to assist the development of education institutions, whether primary and nursery schools or in the secondary sector, and to dispense information on policy decisions for effectiveness in the management of schools.

The Secretary of State is not an educationist and he needs advice. That advice will come from an independent inspectorate. It may sometimes be unpalatable to the Secretary of State, whoever he is. From my experience on the Select Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, I know that Secretaries of State—not just the present Secretary of State—often lack knowledge of education, no matter how high-powered they may be. The chief inspector, his inspectorate and the teachers will not lack knowledge of education. We want the inspectorate to convey to the Secretary of State and to others involved in education the fact that they have noticed aspects in schools that need attention. There should be gatherings of teachers or those who run the education system to consider what has gone wrong.

The inspectorate put out a document entitled, "The Implementation of the Curriculum Requirements of ERA". It stated that in primary schools, there were

"too few micro-computers, inadequate or outdated library collections, a lack of good quality books and shortages of some items of basic equipment for mathematics and physical science."

One would expect Government action to flow from such a report when such criticism had been made by the inspectorate. We want the chief inspector to have the right to make such reports. The document said of secondary schools:

"about three-quarters of the schools visited expected problems in staffing Key Stage 4. Shortages were predicted in a significant number of schools for every national curriculum subject except PE".

Such reports go to the Government and we want the chief inspector to be able to promote efficiency and economy, as we have said in the new clauses.

8.45 pm

The annual report of HM senior chief inspector of schools for 1989-90 stated:

"In many primary schools, the lack of non-teaching time for class teachers remains a serious obstacle to effective planning and preparation of work."

The report pointed out that inefficiency flows from certain matters in school. The inspectors have also said that schools are crumbling and that buckets wait for the water. I should expect the inspectorate to convey such information to a Secretary of State—especially this one. Until recently, he had not even visited a school in his constituency, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has often said.

The chief inspector must have a broader brief than that determined by the political interests of the Secretary of State. He must be able to stand up to a Secretary of State and to initiate developments without being dominated by him. Valuable comments such as those I quoted will not be forthcoming unless the inspectorate is independent and can initiate studies, as we have suggested in new clauses 3 and 4. We have made serious points, yet the Government take no notice of what is happening in schools. We are trying to get them to take notice.

Ms. Armstrong: I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). Manoeuvrings are going on among the usual channels and my hon. Friend is continually called out to take part. I suspect that that is why the Secretary of State is also absent.

We are debating a critical aspect of the Bill, and I listened with care to the Minister. I was far from convinced that he had understood what we are trying to achieve through new clauses 3 and 4. I was also far from convinced that he had taken on board the issue of school effectiveness which we pushed in Committee.

The Minister continues to assert that the issue of how the national inspectorate will undertake its duties is being stirred up by the Opposition. He believes that quality is not an issue. We are very concerned that the method of inspection, other than through HMI, will be substantially flawed. We are also concerned by the severity with which HMI is to be cut down. The number of inspectors will be considerably fewer than at present.

We want a national inspection of schools, with an ability to enforce recommendations. We want to know whether what an inspection team says about a school in Northumberland, for example, being effective can be compared with a report of a similar inspection in, say, Norfolk or West Sussex. We hope that this aim is at the heart of the Bill and that the Government want to introduce a system that will allow it, but we feel that the Bill will not achieve that. In the new clause, we seek to insert conditions which would enable the chief inspector to undertake comparable studies in different parts of the country; this would lead to the national protection of standards that we feel is absolutely critical.

When I worked in a polytechnic, HMI inspected the course on a regular basis and worked with it, and I was able to talk to individual inspectors over many years. They felt that a critical part of their expertise was their knowledge of what went on in different parts of the country. Although individuals inspected individual institutions, the inspectorate as a whole covered the country. Inspectors discussed their findings and no report was written on any institution without the involvement of other members of the inspectorate. One of our concerns is that, under the proposed system of inspection, that would not happen.

There is another aspect. Under the proposed system, school inspections will take place in a well-heralded way. They will take place when the school asks for them to take place, and they will be well organised beforehand. While most of HMI's inspections are of that regular nature, one of its important methods of operation has come from its power to drop in when it wants to and not when an institution invites it. In this way, inspectors sometimes see things that they would not see if they announced their visits well beforehand or were invited to come.

That is what gives us confidence that at present HMI can maintain a national perspective and acquire wide experience which enables its members to judge whether something is working well. The new clause would enable the inspectorate to promote and undertake studies of efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the management of schools in both England and Wales. We are critically concerned with school effectiveness, how a school enables a child to progress. It is the way in which the school ensures that every child makes progress that is the measure of its effectiveness. It is not simply an outcome, it is the progress that a child makes in the school. We particularly want HMI to be able to consider and monitor that.

Mr. Steinberg: My hon. Friend will be aware of the report commissioned by the National Union of Teachers from Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—"The Cost of Implementing the National Curriculum in Primary Schools". The report, from what no one can deny are leading management consultants, estimated that the average recurrent costs of the national curriculum would be something like £671 million per annum over the first five years, plus start-up costs of £1,263 million. If the new clause were accepted, inspectors could, on the basis of such information, examine schools to see where resources were necessary, what schools were missing out on and what was needed in the way of extra teachers, equipment and so on. The report, which is a wide-ranging one, gives that information, and this is the type of information that the new clause would allow the inspectors to encourage in schools.

Ms. Armstrong: My hon. Friend makes a telling point.

We must know the effect of legislation not just on an individual school but across the educational system. The inspectorate has been severely pared, yet it has been given new powers so that its work load will increase rather than

[Ms. Armstrong]

decrease. Training is very much in my thoughts and is important to me. I should have thought that training alone would make sufficient work for the number of people that the inspectorate will have to train, yet training will be only a small part of HMI's functions. The new clause would give the inspectorate, through the chief inspector, the right to look at school effectiveness, and to commission from others studies that would allow it to look at effectiveness across the system.

The Minister failed to recognise that earlier when he tried to rubbish the clause. It is precisely because the Bill fails to cover this point and is weak on monitoring standards across the system that we want the new clause accepted. I constantly live in hope. I live in hope as regards the Government and look to whatever better feelings they may have. While not being too optimistic, therefore, I hope that the Minister will reconsider and accept the new clause and the one relating to Wales, as we accept the amendments that the Minister tabled in respect of the other clauses. We do not object to them.

Mr. Steinberg: The introduction of the Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte report states:

"The National Curriculum, introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act and progressively implemented by Statutory Order from the date of the Act, is having wide-ranging consequences for the way in which schools structure the educational experience of their pupils. These consequences are widely perceived to include:

increased demands on teachers' time, which must be addressed either by appointing further staff or by informally expecting staff in post to work longer hours

changes in maximum class sizes, particularly for practical work, which again has implications for teaching staff

increased resource expenditure as heads and governors equip [or re-equip] their schools to meet the curriculum demands

increased staff training for teachers

and possibly new training needs for Governors also,

changes to the balance of the curriculum between different subjects and activities."

That is a grand assessment of what the national curriculum has meant since it was introduced by the Education Reform Act 1988. New clauses 3 and 4 would give the chief inspector the power to initiate research into aspects of education deemed by him or her to be worthy of that study. They would allow chief inspectors to investigate the problems highlighted by the independent report carried out by Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte.

If the national curriculum is to be successful, we should know what resources are needed. My colleagues and I fully support the national curriculum, but if it is not resourced, it will be of no value to the educational system.

9 pm

If HMI cannot initiate research into aspects of the national curriculum and its resources, we will not know whether the curriculum is working. I hope that the Minister will consider the new clauses seriously and not rubbish them as he did earlier.

If new clauses 3 and 4 are accepted, we should be able to discover, over several years, whether the national curriculum was working and whether more resources were needed. The Government always shudder when they hear the word "resources". They believe that the schools and education are being resourced. However, over the past few years, education spending, in real terms and as a proportion of GNP, has decreased. If the national curriculum is not being implemented, we should be aware of that fact. The new clauses would allow the chief inspector and the staff to carry out research to find out what is happening.

I hope that the Minister will take note of what my colleagues and I have said and consider seriously the implications of the new clauses so that we can discover whether the national curriculum is a success.

Mr. Fallon: With the leave of the House, I should like to reply to the debate.

We have had what I suppose I can describe as an interesting debate. A number of points have been raised, several of which were more oblique to the new clauses than others. I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not comment in detail on the speeches of the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery).

The hon. Member for Brent, South specifically asked whether I would receive a delegation at the Department of Education and Science. Ministers are well known for their courtesy in receiving delegations where there is a reorganisation. I do not know the details of the Brent reorganisation or whether it is within time, but I would be only too delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman and to hear his views and those of his constituents about any particular proposals in his constituency.

However, I must reply to the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). I am grateful for her welcome to the Government amendments. I hope that we can put them to one side and, when the time comes a little later this evening, they can be written into the Bill without further ado.

I had already explained at some length to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) that it is not necessary to define in statute either the relationship between the two bodies—a point accepted in "Raising the Standard"—or the particular function of the chief inspector. The hon. Member for Durham, North-West did not explain why the Labour party now suddenly wants to define that relationship precisely and make HMCI subordinate to the Audit Commission and why new clause 3 is inconsistent with "Raising the Standard."

Leaving that aside, I assure the hon. Lady that HMCI will not need the new clause to perform the studies and research work about which she was worried. Those powers are in the Bill. The hon. Lady thinks that the Bill does not cover that point. I draw her attention and that of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) to clause 2(1), which states:

"The Chief Inspector for England shall have the general duty of keeping the Secretary of State informed about—

(a) the quality of the education provided by schools in England;

(b) the educational standards achieved in those schools; and

(c) whether the financial resources made available to those schools are managed efficiently."

It is our contention, therefore, that the chief inspector already has all the powers that he needs to carry out the studies that are suggested in the new clause.

With that assurance, I hope that the hon. Lady will finally be satisfied that she does not need the new clause to give HMCI the power to undertake the studies that she wants. We think that he already has that power in the Bill. We think also that it would be rather dangerous to

introduce the subordinate relationship with the Audit Commission. We would much rather see those two bodies work in happy consultation with each other.

Mr. Straw: As I moved the new clause, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New clause 6

ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS WITH REGARD TO INSPECTION TEAMS

'( ):—(1) The Chief Inspector may determine that a person who has completed a course of training in accordance with paragraph 4 of Schedule 2 is in need of supervision, induction or probation and he shall maintain a list (the "Conditionally Approved List") of the names of such persons.

(2) Without prejudice to the power of the Chief Inspector to register a person subject to conditions under subsection 10(5)(c), the Chief Inspector may in particular impose conditions which determine the circumstances in which a person whose name is entered on the list maintained under subsection (1) may be a member of an inspection team for the purposes of Schedule 2.'.—*[Ms. Armstrong.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Armstrong: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 62, in clause 10, page 6, line 32, at end insert—

'(6A) Nothing in this section is to be taken as preventing the Chief Inspector from imposing conditions under subsection (5)(c) which determine the eligibility of persons acting as a member of an inspection team assisting the registered inspector in conducting an inspection in addition to the provisions regarding such eligibility mentioned in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of Schedule 2 to this Act.'.

No. 10, in Schedule 2, page 19, line 17, at end insert—

'5A.—(1) The Chief Inspector shall not admit to a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) or 5(1) any person, not being a registered inspector, who in his opinion is not a fit or proper person for the purpose of carrying out an inspection.

(2) Any person admitted to a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) or 5(1) shall be excluded from it if, in the opinion of the Chief Inspector, he is unlikely to qualify for a certificate under sub-paragraph (3).

(3) Any person who has completed a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) and 5(1) and who, in the opinion of the Chief Inspector, is adequately trained for the purpose of carrying out inspections under this Act, shall receive a certificate to this effect.

(4) No person shall carry out an inspection under this Act unless he has received a certificate under sub-paragraph (3).'.

Ms. Armstrong: I may need to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I hope that you will now catch the eye of one of my hon. Friends.

Mr. O'Hara: I trust that, at the beginning, you will see that I am addressing the subject, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I hope you now accept I was doing in my previous contribution. Perhaps it was not so obvious at the beginning——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be more precise in his presentation.

Mr. O'Hara: I shall, to the best of my ability, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The new clause and the associated amendments are concerned with quality control, which is central to the Government's citizens charter and, I hope, central to the policies of any Government. I therefore appeal to the Government to consider the new clause with sympathy.

There is a fundamental flaw in the Bill—the contradiction in the Tory philosophy of separation of the provider from the monitor. The provider is the master of the monitor—he hires the monitor. As we said earlier, who pays the piper calls the tune. We must have monitors, but if we cannot separate the monitor from the provider, we must at least have effectiveness in the monitor. We are considering the quality control of monitors—in other words, "quis custodiet ipsos custodies".

Clause 10 refers to persons who shall conduct inspections of schools in England and Wales.

"No person shall conduct an inspection . . . unless he is registered . . . for the purposes of this Act."

That is fine. It is provided that the chief inspector shall compose the register and shall not register a person except in certain conditions—for example, if it appears to him that the person is a fit and proper person to discharge the functions of a registered inspector and that he will be capable of competent and effective inspection under the legislation.

The clause goes on to deal with the way in which a person might apply for registration. Such a person will have to pay a fee. If one turns to schedule 2 one sees that registration criteria are specified. Paragraph 4 says:

"No person shall conduct an inspection of a school in England, or act as a member of an inspection team . . . unless he has completed a course of training".

That, too, is fine. There are some criteria for registration. The course of training will be provided by the chief inspector for England or will comply with arrangements approved by the chief inspector. But the provisions peter out when it comes to payment of the fee.

Paragraph 4 of the schedule says simply:

"Where the Chief Inspector for England provides such training he may charge such fees as are reasonable for the purpose of recovering the whole, or part, of the cost of providing it."

But there is something missing. We are told about the length of the training course and about the price, but not about the quality. No standards are set. This is a good example of "Never mind the quality; feel the width and look at the price."

The question of standards will arise only if a person failing takes the matter to appeal. In those circumstances the inspector may give the reasons for failure. That is not satisfactory. In respect of the training courses there is no reference to standards or even guidelines. We need to know by what criteria a would-be inspector will be said to have passed. That is a serious omission. Such guidelines would be helpful to various people. For example, they would help registered inspectors to select suitable team members. Some hard and fast quality criteria would be set. The guidelines would also help team members to secure employment. They would be particularly helpful to lay members of inspection teams—and the Bill makes it very obvious that the Government are anxious to recruit such people.

I understand that there have been disturbing suggestions that certain groups of people may be accredited by the senior chief inspector almost on the nod.

[Mr. O'Hara]

That cannot be satisfactory. Surely the Bill should contain some provision setting the standards that must be achieved by would-be inspectors attending these training courses.

One could extend that principle and stipulate—as is done in other professions—a probationary period, particularly in the case of a lay member entering education, to ensure both that the member fulfils the promise that he or she showed during training, and the monitoring of the skills that inspection team members bring to the system. A wide variety of skills will be needed among those recruited to the many teams which are to undertake 6,000 inspections per year.

9.15 pm

It has long been an accepted principle of teacher training—at least until the Secretary of State recently kicked over the table—that the responsibility vested in a teacher is such that he or she must complete a probationary period. That is a common requirement in many other professions. If the responsibility vested in a teacher is so great, how much greater is that vested in an inspector in monitoring the effectiveness of teachers? It seems anomalous that one should be subject of quality control, but not the other.

The Secretary of State may argue that the registered inspector will oversee that aspect. However, one team member will almost certainly serve many teams. Some people will make their living doing that. If quality control is left with the many registered inspectors for which an individual team member may work at any one time, that will be a recipe for chaos.

The principle of a probationary year for teachers marries well with the evident pathological distrust of teacher trainers that the Government have manifested—particularly in recent weeks. However, I cannot understand how that distrust marries with the Government's trust in the capabilities of an untried cadre of registered inspectors in a shifting market of inspection teams.

Schedule 2(2)(a) states that at least one member of a team shall be a person

> "(i) without personal experience in the management of any school or the provision of education in any school otherwise than as a governor or in any other voluntary capacity); and
> (ii) whose primary function on the team is not that of providing financial or business expertise".

Schedule 2(4) states:

> "Any experience of a kind mentioned in sub-paragraph (2)(a) which it is reasonable to regard as insignificant, having regard to the purposes of sub-paragraph (2), may be ignored by the registered inspector."

There is enshrined in the Bill an ascending scale of insignificance by which the experience of team members will be graded, and their capabilities to perform the job for which they put themselves forward will be forecast by few relevant clues from their past performance and experience.

Mr. McFall: My hon. Friend mentioned the registered inspectors. The registered inspector may have to take on different people for certain schools—for example, schools which teach minority subjects. My hon. Friend mentioned an example of such a school. The inspector will not be familiar with the people in that school. How will the inspector ensure quality control in the inspection of schools? That is an important point. The Bill does not tell us the answer to that question, and certainly the Secretary of State and his Ministers have not explained that point.

Mr. O'Hara: My hon. Friend leads me neatly to my next point—the nature of the skills that the system needs. I maintain, as my hon. Friend implies, that the many registered inspectors are incapable of monitoring what skills the system needs because of the nature of the system.

The system needs a full range of skills. I acknowledge that the Government have shown a commendable commitment to developing and targeting skills and allocating resources so that the skills that the system needs are developed. For example, they introduced the local education authority training grants scheme. I am prepared to concede that the scheme is an improvement on the old free-for-all system of training. I am referring to in-service training in particular but applying the principle to the development of a cross-section of skills for the system.

As a school governor several years ago, I was often worried by the reports of the number of training courses that members of staff had attended. The audit of the training was weighted on the side of those who received training and went on to develop their careers. That was fine—of course, one needs to provide that opportunity for staff—but the new-found skills often contributed little to the curriculum of the school that was effectively supporting the staff training. The LEATGS gave better assurances that the funding allocated to training went on skills that the schools needed and could use.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about the grants and education support and training scheme and LEATGS. I am sure that he has noticed that the amount of money that the Government make available for training is 50 per cent. more for grant-maintained schools than for schools in the maintained sector. That disparity will clearly have an impact on the provisions with which we are now dealing. The ability to train teachers will be considerably reduced in the maintained sector. I wonder whether, in his interesting speech, my hon. Friend was about to come to the unfair differences between the grant-maintained sector and the maintained sector?

Mr. O'Hara: Indeed, that is a good example. If one assumes that the resources for the development of skills in the system as a whole are finite, the disproportionate allocation of resources to the sector which is independent of the LEAs must be at the expense of the maintained sector. That is at a time when, as I said earlier, there is a desperate need for new skills to be developed and for teachers in post to have their skills updated.

Given the Government's commitment to the development and deployment of the necessary skills in teachers, it is difficult to understand their failure to make similar provision for school inspectors. Given the enormous number of inspectors who will be needed to carry out all those inspections every year and the openness to the trade —I use the word advisedly because of the evident desire, judging from Minister's comments, that butchers and bakers be avidly recruited to inspection teams—it is crucial that inspectors recruited have the skills required by the team if it is to be called that.

Mr. McFall: I am interested in my hon. Friend's argument and would like him to give us a greater insight

into it. Paragraph 3(2)(a) of schedule 2 contains the butcher and baker clause, which states that at least one member has no

"personal experience in the management of any school".

Given his earlier remarks, and his experience in dealing with probationary teachers who need two years' experience, how does my hon. Friend think that that butcher or baker person can have the proper experience to evaluate his own skills? I have been responsible for liaising with probationary teachers, and for guiding them through the two-year period. My experiences have led me to believe that they need the experience gained in those two years and that assistance. How can butchers and bakers get that when they are drafted into schools straight away?

Mr. O'Hara: It is indeed difficult to see how, and I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. One of the most important things that those butchers and bakers might learn on a training course is the limit of their prerogative in assessing the effectiveness of a school. Certainly it is a conundrum. Without a course of training and some criteria for assessment of their suitability at the end of it, it is difficult to see how the requirement that my hon. Friend reminds us of could be met.

I must get away from the subject of the butcher and baker because I might be accused of dwelling unfairly on an untypical example, although I do not think so, given the clear and full statement of that provision in the Bill. I am thinking of people who might have skills in one area, but might not be able to transfer them to another.

For example, someone with skills in an academic subject—perhaps a redundant inspector recruited on to an inspection team—might apply the skills that he used in his former existence when on one of the new model inspection teams. He might have to make an assessment at a school for special educational needs, a specialised area where he might not be able to make such an assessment. I have come across people who have come from the outside and have come a cropper—and may even cause damage—because they do not understand the subject of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A special skill is required to deal with that.

Mr. McFall: I know of one example and ask for my hon. Friend's comments. It concerns the pastoral field of education. Educationists who devote themselves to the pastoral care of children have a different perspective of such care than a social worker would have. I have had experience of trying to merge and manage both the social work and educational perspectives. It takes a number of years before that commonality of view is established. That quality is germane to the inspection team in terms of the perspective of the individual when assessing the worthiness of a school.

Mr. O'Hara: I attempted to make that point earlier, when I sought to intervene on my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery). He was addressing the difference between efficiency in monetary terms and effectiveness in educational terms.

Cost-effectiveness may be achieved by front-loading the provision of nursery education, as that will save costs later on, especially as it is a sector in which resources should be spent. Likewise, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) has just said, a judicious allocation of resources to the pastoral sector of education provision is money well spent because such pastoral care often leads to savings when a pupil continues his educational career. Such pastoral care is a specialised area of education, and it can identify problems early.

9.30 pm

Given the facility that inspectors will have to tout around for recruitment by different registered inspectors, there must be some quality control over the system. That system should consist of a package which contains, at the very least, a scheme of certification at the end of the course training—which we applaud—and the facility for a provisional or limited right to practise. One could take that even further by including a need for people to acquire new skills if they intend to make inspections of a sector of education of which they have no experience.

The new clause and the amendments could be adapted for the purpose. The underlying point is that there should be provision for a range of skills to be available and some system whereby those skills can be standardised and certified.

Such a responsibility is too great a task to be left to the registered inspectors. In fact, it would be impractical for those inspectors to undertake that task, given the way in which the market is designed to work. That is why new clause 6 states:

"The Chief Inspector may determine that a person who has completed a course of training in accordance with paragraph 4 of Schedule 2 is in need of supervision, induction or probation and he shall maintain a list (the "Conditionally Approved List") of the names of such persons.

Without prejudice to the power of the Chief Inspector to register a person subject to conditions under subsection 10(5)(c), the Chief Inspector may in particular impose conditions which determine the circumstances in which a person whose name is entered on the list maintained under subsection (1) may be a member of an inspection team for the purposes of Schedule 2.'."

Amendment No. 10 complements the new clause, and part of it states:

"The Chief Inspector shall not admit to a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) or 5(1) any person, not being a registered inspector, who in his opinion is not a fit or proper person for the purpose of carrying out an inspection."

That responsibility is most effectively and appropriately left in the hands of the chief inspector, so that we avoid the entry into inspection teams of mythical individuals as exemplified in the joke advertisement that I have before me, which says:

"V. cheapo licensed plumber and HMI schools inspector. All types of schools and drains inspected. Estimates free. Guaranteed customer satisfaction. Very keen prices."

Mr. Matthew Taylor: I apologise to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) for being absent at the start of his comments. It was largely because I had expected a vote on the previous new clause.

The new clause and amendment tabled by the Labour party and my amendment on behalf of the Liberal Democrats are all aimed at essentially the same issue, which was debated at length in Committee and which relates to the supervision of team members. Opposition Members are worried that only the registered inspector will be directly controlled.

Ministers have accepted the argument that team members must be suitably qualified. I shall not repeat my discussion with the Minister, when it was suggested that team members' training would be overseen because the registered inspector would have to ensure team members' in-service training and the updating of their skills. I pointed out that, precisely because those teams will not be

[Mr. Matthew Taylor]

attached to a particular registered inspector and because people with particular skills may be called on infrequently by different inspectors, the necessary oversight will not occur.

It is not hard to imagine subjects in which the situation may change rapidly. The most obvious is technology, where changes can be fundamental and relatively sudden. The Bill should provide that the chief inspector ensures that people who carry out inspections in schools under a registered inspector have the necessary skills. Amendment No. 62 proposes that in a way which I hope will meet the objections that the Government raised in Committee. It is not the same as amendments that I moved then, which sought to require, first, control or identification of team members and, secondly, the regular recertification of team members in every case.

The new version would permnit Her Majesty's chief inspectors to take action only where they considered it necessary in particular cases or classes of case, such as when a change in respect of a technology teacher or inspector had taken place and that change was considered fundamental enough to require it, or perhaps where team members should be aware of and understand important changes to the national curriculum. I hope that that introduces the necessary provisions that should have been in the Bill all along, while meeting the desire for flexibility, rather than inserting the over-prescriptive format that the Minister described in Committee.

Mr. McFall: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that without the amendment the Bill contains nothing to validate and assess individual members of the inspection team? That concern is held not merely by Opposition Members but is articulated throughout the country. I have a letter from Alderbrook school in the metropolitan borough of Solihull—a Tory authority, as far as I know. It states that the school is worried about the quality of people who will make up the inspection team under the Bill's proposals, and the basic criteria and consistency of appraisal that will apply.

The letter states:

"Serious problems will undoubtedly arise if the teams lack credibility with staff and parents."

If communications between the inspection team and the staff are flawed from the beginning, that will cause serious problems. The governors of Alderbrook school believe that it is bizarre that one member of the inspection team should know nothing of the educational system. In order to allow for the short, perceptive, searching, professional queries that are currently made by inspectors, it is important that the Government should accept the amendment, or there is nothing to guarantee quality control.

Mr. Taylor: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is the Minister's express concern that the HMI should set national standards. Without the sort of measure proposed in my amendment, it is hard to see how, in a changing world, HMI will be able to ensure that inspections are carried out to that uniform standard.

It is important to stress that, while I think that the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and I both have strong objections to some of the Bill's principles—the way in which inspections will take place and the private contractual relationship—the amendment is not an attack on the Government's principles. Those arguments have taken place elsewhere. The amendment is designed merely to ensure the quality and standard of the inspection.

I introduced the amendment having listened to what the Minister said in his objections to earlier amendments that tackled the same issue. It responds to the Minister's concerns and I hope that he will take the opportunity and show the same flexibility in meeting the worry which, as the hon. Member for Dumbarton rightly says, comes not just from the Opposition but from many people within the Conservative party at local level and perhaps even at national level. Those people want to ensure, above all else, that the highest quality standards are maintained throughout the inspection team as well as at the level of registered inspector.

Mr. Fatchett: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on the way in which he spoke to the amendments. He raised a number of important points. Central to the thrust of the debate on the amendments and new clauses is the issue of standards of inspection.

Anyone who has followed the debates with interest will recognise that there is a fundamental division between us. The Government essentially believe in a free market in education and that sensitive and important issues such as inspection can be left to the free market.

Mr. Fallon: That is nonsense.

Mr. Fatchett: The Minister rightly says that that is nonsense—I agree that it is nonsense to hold those views. However, they are underpinned by a philosophy that the flow of information to parents will ensure that, in a free market, free choices are made and parents will be able to guarantee quality of schools on that basis.

That philosophy totally ignores two important factors. First, it assumes that each and every parent is equal in the education market, and has the ability and resources to make an equal choice about which is the best school in the locality. As the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said on Second Reading, that is far from the case. If a market is operated, it will be inapplicable in rural areas. Those who live in rural areas—this applies to the majority of parents everywhere—want a good neighbourhood school. They are not looking for market provision, which reflects the notion that it is possible to pick and choose. Parents in rural areas want to send their children to a good neighbourhood school. In that sense, the Government are abdicating their responsibilities.

9.45 pm

The Government have refused to recognise that the system has to be managed and that they have a responsibility. The Bill represents the Government washing their hands in respect of standards in the education system. Last week saw the publication of an important report on primary education, which referred to signs of declining standards over the past four years in literacy and numeracy. During those four years there has been substantial change as a result of the Education Reform Act 1988. The committee of inquiry made it clear that the pace and burden of change had been two aspects among others that may have led to a decline in education standards.

It is interesting that during the same period the only body that could achieve the "standardised" approach that

my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South talked about—the Assessment of Performance Unit—was disbanded by the Government. We are not able to make comparisons of reading performance and numeracy performance over the years. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) has rightly said on many occasions that it is important that we should be able over a period to make an assessment of standards in the education system. The hon. Gentleman asked earlier for a broader perspective. Indeed, he talked about an international perspective so that we could compare British children with children in France, Germany, Holland and other European Community countries.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): As my hon. Friend knows, my constituency is divided into urban and rural areas. Many small schools in the rural areas have been closed irrespective of their standards. In some instances, the children who attended these schools had a better educational start than some children in urban areas as a result of better teacher-pupil ratios. On the basis of standards, many small schools in rural areas would have remained open. They have been closed because of the Government's financial problems in the education system.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend has made an interesting and important intervention.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I am happy to say that, when Lancashire county council tried to close five rural schools in my constituency—they were all of a very high standard—my hon. Friend the Minister did not permit the closures to take place and we still have the schools. The same thing happened in the north end of my constituency. Closure was not permitted, we still have the schools and they have excellent standards.

Mr. Fatchett: I shall pay the hon. Lady a compliment. If I were the chair of the education committee, I would not even dream of closing a school in her constituency. The risk involved would be too great.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) made an important intervention on the quality of small rural schools. Sometimes their standards can be affected in terms of ability to deliver the national curriculum. I do not know whether this goes wide of the new clause, but it has been brought to my attention that the Under-Secretary of State—we have heard him defend the Roman Catholic community in Darlington—is keen to close small rural schools. That might well bring him into conflict with the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). It would be a case of the irremovable object meeting the untestable force. It would be an interesting phenomenon.

I was saying that there is a need for some overall assessment and some management of the education system. When the Government disbanded the assessment of performance unit they left their responsibility behind. They said that they had no real reason to maintain assessment figures and no reason to maintain any system of measurement. That is an abdication of their responsibilities. Parents have a right to know what is happening and whether, under this Government's stewardship, standards of education have improved during the last 12 or 13 years.

Mr. Flannery: Does my hon. Friend agree that education standards cannot possibly be maintained without sufficient money and expertise? Reference has already been made to paragraph 3(2) of schedule 2 which says:

> "It shall be the duty of the registered inspector to ensure that—
>
> (a) at least one member of the inspection team is a person—
>
> (i) without personal experience in the management of any school or the provision of education in any school (otherwise than as a governor or in any other voluntary capacity)".

It is bizarre to believe that somebody who knows nothing at all—it almost says that here—about something can become an inspector. I wonder what lawyers and doctors would think about that. Educationists are disgusted about it and wonder who, in God's name, thought it up.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend makes two important points. He rightly pointed out that in the context of declining and tight resources it is difficult to achieve high education standards. During the last few years, great pressure has been put on many local authority budgets. My hon. Friend knows, from his experience in Sheffield, that this Government's education policies have caused devastating damage.

My hon. Friend was also right to point out, as we must continue to point out, that if standards have declined, they have declined under the stewardship not of a Labour Government, but of a Conservative Government who have invested little in the state education system.

My hon. Friend also raised another important point: in what other context would it be a statutory condition that a person without any suitable qualifications should apply for a particular job? My hon. Friend said that this seemed a little bizarre to him. He referred to what would happen if lawyers and doctors were able to set themselves up as part of a team without any relevant expertise. One might then see advertisements containing words such as "Doctors wanted for a general practice; expertise not required."

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I had intended to ask my hon. Friends to think of any other circumstances in which a person would go to an interview for a job and make it clear that he had no expertise. I can provide an example. Throughout the last 12 years, we have had Ministers with responsibility for education who have no expertise in education. That is a very bad model to work from, particularly for schools.

Mr. McFall: According to paragraph 3(2) of schedule 2, only the registered inspector will have to be validated by the Department of Education and Science. The registered inspector's team will include somebody with the minimum training as outlined in schedule 2 and no or very little expertise in education, but within the inspector's team he will be regarded as an expert. That person's comments will be included in the report and will then be put into the public domain. That could mislead parents, even though the Government say that they do not want that to happen.

Mr. Flannery: More than one person could have no training and expertise in education.

Mr. Fatchett: I intend to deal with that matter, but the framework for my speech is tight and detailed. My hon. Friend would be disappointed if I dealt with these points out of sequence.

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend is looking for examples. One example might be the Prime Minister, who is not sure whether he is qualified to do anything. He cannot remember what qualifications he has. Perhaps my hon. Friend would agree that it sounds very much like an Arthur Daley system of certification that we are contemplating.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend makes a distinctive and separate point.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Hon. Members have referred to schedule 2(3), which says:

"at least one member of the inspection team is a person—
(i) without personal experience".

There is nothing to say that several members of the team may not be people without personal experience. When someone is setting out in a new business, one problem is pricing a job. That might lead to skimping and to the employment of a number of people without personal experience because they would come cheaper. That is one danger inherent in the provision.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend was not in the House for the earlier debate on new clause 2, when I talked about a trial and error inspection team. My hon. Friend's notion is close to a trial and error inspection team. Presumably the Government intend to get the price right and will not worry about the quality. In a sense, those remarks were a preamble to the more detailed points which I want to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South made strong detailed arguments about four or five central points, including the cost of training inspectors. He wondered how that cost will be met. If you have read schedule 2, Mr. Speaker, as I am sure you have, because you like to keep yourself fully informed of the affairs of the House, you will have seen that in the various paragraphs there is no reference to cost. Particularly in paragraph 4(3) there is no reference to how the system is to be paid for. There is a reference to

"recovering the whole, or part, of the cost"

but it does not give the source of the recovery or the nature of the courses which will be provided.

My hon. Friend made the important point that the training of registered inspectors may be expensive. Will that cost be met by the team of registered inspectors, by the new business to which my hon. Friend referred or out of the DES programme? Will the full cost, or only part of it, be met? We need answers to those important questions, because they may affect the quality of the training.

Given that the system is designed to be cheap, coming from a cheap Government, the training that is deemed to be attractive may be cheap for the inspection firm. In setting up the firm, one may look at the possibility of finding cheap initial training. If so, the quality of the training may not be substantial.

We need to know more about the cost of training. We also need to know more about the quality guidelines for the initial training. We have heard that the training of the registered inspector, and the team may not be subject to quality guidelines. The inspection may satisfy the chief inspector but there is no indication about the quality of the inspection and the guidelines to be met.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South has much experience of teacher training. He has great experience with the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, which has set out important and specific guidelines on what is necessary for initial teacher training. Such a model could be used effectively to satisfy the provisions of the Bill. That is essentially what we recommend in the new clause and amendments. We need guidelines to ensure that standards and quality are maintained.

My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South also talked effectively about the breadth of the inspection team. You may know, Mr. Speaker, that my hon. Friend has a genuine interest and ability in the classics, and that he has a fluency in Greek which is rarely shown in the House.

Mr. O'Hara: My hon. Friend gives me the opportunity to satisfy the Minister, who challenged me in Committee——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.
Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I may be able to assist the House. We have a lengthy amendment paper on which we have not made much progress. Since 7 pm, no Conservative Back Bencher has taken part in the debates, although there have, of course, been the usual ministerial replies to debates. It has become clear that the House is unlikely to be able to complete the business at a reasonable hour tonight.

I have been discussing through the usual channels and with my opposite numbers our progress so far, and I have been seeking ways in which, if the Opposition take up less time in debate, we may be able to shorten matters. It is a long time since I have had the experience of feeling myself trying to force an agreement on an opposite number who seems not to be disposed to reach an agreement as the evening goes on. For that reason, the Government decided not to move the business of the House motion at 10 pm. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House proposes to make a business statement on how we shall now proceed.

Mr. Straw: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have just witnessed a Government who have no stomach for a fight. The Bill, which was introduced by the Secretary of State to privatise the schools inspectorate and to dismember HM inspectorate, has no support outside the House and precious little support inside the House. The Secretary of State was right to say that no Conservative Member spoke in support of the Bill after 7 pm. However, there was not even a Conservative Back Bencher sitting in silent support of the measure after 7 pm.

Of a total of 75 amendments and new clauses selected for debate today, 31 have been tabled by the Government. It is the Government's unwillingness to debate the measure through tonight which has forced them to withdraw the business at this stage.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is obvious that the Government, who usually use the protection of a guillotine but who have not done so on this occasion, are disinclined to debate the amendments and new clauses tabled by the Opposition. They are frightened that we shall expose their policies for what they are. The privatisation of the inspectors has gone wrong and people outside the House do not agree with the Government. The Government are frightened of being exposed and that is why they did not move the business motion at 10 pm.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are not really points of order for me.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you consider the fact that a Select Committee is considering the hours that the House sits? The Government are pre-empting the Select Committee with their enthusiasm for not moving the business of the House motion when there has not been reasonable discussion on Report.

You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, from your long service in the House that it was fairly common for Report stages to take a considerable time. I understand the lack of morale among Government supporters and their reluctance to stay after 10 o'clock to debate these matters, but when we have serious issues concerning the future of our schoolchildren to consider, it is surely reasonable to expect the Government to be prepared to provide adequate time and not to pre-empt decisions about the hours of the House with precipitate guillotine motions.

Mr. Speaker: These are not matters for me.

Business of the House

10.5 pm

Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): With permission I should like to make a short business statement. The business for tomorrow will now be as follows:

Timetable motion on the Education (Schools) Bill, followed by conclusion of remaining stages of the Education (Schools) Bill. I will announce in my business statement tomorrow the arrangements for the business originally set down for tomorrow.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): Is the Leader of the House aware that that is a statement of which he ought to be ashamed? As I said earlier, the Government have no stomach for a fight. If they had been willing to debate these matters through the night, as we were, and then to ensure that there was sufficient time next week, they would have got their Bill, but the truth is that they are now in total panic over this measure. They know that even with the guillotine tomorrow they have no chance of getting the Bill through the other place and then back here if an election is called for 9 April. Will the Leader of the House confirm that that is the case—if an election is called in the middle of March, there is no way in which this measure can become law?

Will he also explain what will happen to the Welsh revenue support grant order which was due to be debated tomorrow?

Mr. MacGregor: We were willing to accommodate the Opposition in any way today on the Bill. They never asked in any of our discussions for more than one day. Well into today's debate, there was, for the first time, an indication that the Opposition were not prepared to see the Bill through in one day. They never approached Ministers until well into the debate, and we had been quite unable to understand the purpose of their concern. It is now absolutely clear.

I cannot comment on the progress of the Bill when it reaches another place. What I can tell the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is that he has now revealed that his concern is entirely about election timing and the position of the Opposition on election timing.

It is important to make it clear to the House that I have been under pressure from all sides of the House to accommodate a large number of debates. I am under great pressure to accommodate the Friendly Societies Bill and hon. Members on both sides of the House want that Bill to be passed. I am trying to secure it in this Parliament.

After every business statement, I am asked to fit in more debates. I have endeavoured to meet the wishes of Members on both sides of the House, including their desire to debate the Friendly Societies Bill, and it was on that basis that we agreed to spend one day on this Bill. When it was clear that there was no agreement on that, we had to take the steps that we have taken to protect the rest of the programme.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Will the Leader of the House explain to us why important groups of amendments that are still to be discussed have to be put back to tomorrow? Several of my hon. Friends wished to speak. Several of us were concerned about important aspects of the Bill. Not one speech has been ruled out of

[Mr. George Howarth]

order by the Chair, and we have not been pulled up for being out of order. The whole issue was still to be debated, and we were most concerned about it. Moreover, will the Leader of the House explain what is to be done when local authorities all over the country are waiting to hear what is to happen with the revenue support grant—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask hon. Members below the Gangway not to converse among themselves? It is difficult to hear at this end of the Chamber.

Mr. George Howarth: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Leader of the House explain how those of us from Merseyside who have had correspondence with the Merseyside fire authority about the rate support grant assessment——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should ask the Leader of the House a question, as Members do with an ordinary business statement.

Mr. Howarth: How can the local authorities which are most concerned about the revenue support grant settlement and how it will affect services—*[Interruption.]* When will they know when the grant settlement—*[Interruption.]* When can local authorities sort that out? It is disgraceful that the Government are running away from —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. MacGregor: I could hear only a small part of the hon. Gentleman's question. However, if I heard him aright, I will make clear the position on the revenue support grant settlements in my business statment tomorrow.

With regard to the question about the time to be given to the Education (Schools) Bill, we had originally agreed absolutely that one day would be sufficient to see the Bill through. If we can agree the timetable motion early tomorrow afternoon, we will have two full days to debate the Bill instead of one.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There is no point of order. These are business questions.

Mr. Hayes: If my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is right in saying that he offered the Opposition more than one day to debate the Education (Schools) Bill and they refused that, it is clear that the Opposition were simply filibustering tonight for political ends. The Opposition have only one person to blame, and that is the shadow Leader of the House.

Mr. MacGregor: The Opposition did not ask for more than one day. We are now giving the Bill two days.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Is it not a little disingenuous of the Leader of the House to pray in aid —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say again to hon. Members below the Gangway that it would be helpful if they would carry on their conversations in the Lobby?

Mr. Boateng: Is it not a little disingenuous of the Leader of the House to pray in aid the long-awaited Friendly Societies Bill when he has already put off the publication of that Bill on several occasions? When will he publish that Bill and stop using it as an excuse to curtail debate about this disastrous measure—the Education (Schools) Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. He cannot ask for the publication of the Friendly Societies Bill and also claim that I am not trying to find time for it. There is a great deal of legislation ahead of us, and many hon. Members on both sides of the House want me to fit in many debates. I am trying to accommodate the Friendly Societies Bill because I am well aware of the desire on both sides of the House in respect of it. I am hoping to find time for it, and that is precisely why I thought that we had reached agreement to deal with the Education (Schools) Bill in one day. If we can find time, I hope to be able to publish the Friendly Societies Bill before long.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): With regard to the debate on the Education (Schools) Bill, is it not clear that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has been forced to make his statement because of the systematic abuse of the procedures of the House by the Labour party and continuous filibustering to prevent proper debate on very important legislation?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I repeat that, if we can move quickly back to the Bill tomorrow afternoon, we will have two days to debate it.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The Leader of the House will be aware that the debate will continue tomorrow at very short notice and that that will make it difficult for some hon. Members who had intended to do so to take part in the debate. Why must the right hon. Gentleman rush ahead with the Bill tomorrow when other business had been arranged? Why did he not arrange for it to be debated at the beginning of next week when it would have been easier for hon. Members, who have a genuine interest in the Bill, to see it through?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry that this is the case, but it was forced upon me. It is important that we proceed with the Bill and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to rearrange his affairs so that we can proceed with it and so that he can participate in the debate.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): My right hon. Friend, in support of his decision, should know that, every time that I have walked into the Chamber on a regular 10-minute basis throughout the evening, there have been only two rather bored Members sitting on the Opposition Benches and one person speaking. Will my right hon. Friend put tomorrow's business back to 14 February, as that would be a jolly good time to discuss tomorrow's business?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not quite sure whether I follow my hon. Friend. I hope to be doing other things on 14 February.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House confirm that the 10 o'clock motion was not moved because the Government feared that they would not be able to sustain the business as they did not have 100 Conservative Members in the House? *[Interruption.]*

Will the Leader of the House make a statement tomorrow on the arrangements that he will make for debating the important revenue support grant orders for England and Wales? He will be aware that local authorities have been notified of that debate. They have budgeted accordingly, and it may cause them great difficulty because they are now faced with the problem that they will have no certainty until those orders are passed.

In his statement tomorrow, will the right hon. Gentleman make it abundantly clear that the reason is the confusion and incompetence of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the rest of the Government in organising the business? Will he also confirm——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is an ordinary business statement. I think that the hon. Member has asked two questions.

Mr. Cryer: May I conclude, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: No. I think that that is enough.

Mr. MacGregor: On the hon. Gentleman's first point in relation to the number of Conservative Members and the closure, it is quite clear that he cannot count, just as the Opposition generally cannot count on their tax and expenditure plans.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point about the revenue support grant orders, I understand the importance of clarifying the position on that, and I shall do so tomorrow.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions must be related to the business announced by the Leader of the House. I shall allow questions to continue until 10.25 pm, when we shall move on to the Adjournment debate.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Is it not evidence of the extreme cynicism with which the Opposition have been dealing with an important education measure that, in Committee, they should not have any problem with the timetable, yet this afternoon should spend no less than three hours debating the first new clause and then not even vote on it?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has a point. As I have said, we are now giving two days for the Bill to be considered on Report and on Third Reading.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Leader of the House confirm that, throughout the 12 years of the Conservative Administration, there has been concern about standards in education? Will he confirm also that previous Secretaries of State, including himself, have not considered it necessary to introduce such a Bill? Will he confirm also that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is the third question. Let us have the answer to the first two questions first.

Mr. Spearing: I am coming to the question for tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. Will not the business for tomorrow, which changes the goalposts for the assessment of standards and upsets an inspectorate of 130 years' standing, cause extreme cynicism not only among the teaching profession but among most parents in this country?

Mr. MacGregor: I confirm that throughout the period of this Government we have been concerned about standards in education and we have constantly been improving them. I confirm also that I wholly support my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State in bringing forward the Bill. Had I still been at the Department, I would have done so. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's third point arises.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, unless there is more self-discipline on both sides of the House between now and the general election, we shall do no credit to ourselves? Is it not a fact that my right hon. Friend offered two days for the business but that in the end it was agreed that there should be one day? Now the Government have agreed to provide two days. What on earth do the Opposition have to grumble about? They must be interested only in pure filibustering to frustrate legislation. Can my hon. Friend confirm that in the end the House will be the loser?

Mr. MacGregor: I can confirm two things. First, we now propose to provide two days for the remainder of the Report stage and Third Reading to enable the Bill to be discussed thoroughly, as happened in Committee. Secondly, we are getting on with the business of the normal legislative programme and endeavouring to do as much as possible in a parliamentary Session that will inevitably be shorter than usual. It is to do that in an orderly fashion that we are taking this action tonight.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): While welcoming the provision of two days for the remaining stages of the Bill, may I ask the Leader to ensure that, in the consultations about the timetable motion, discussions will be held with all parties in the House? Four or five clauses in the Bill which relate to the Welsh Office were dealt with very inadequately in Committee as a result of the make-up of the Committee. Will the Leader of the House ensure that we have an opportunity to discuss those clauses on the Floor of the House tomorrow?

Mr. MacGregor: That could best be achieved by having the timetable motion disposed of very quickly, so that the whole day could be devoted to the Bill itself.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Will it be possible, during the debate on the timetable motion tomorrow, to raise the fact that headmasters in my constituency are refusing to deliver the leaflet that the Department of Education and Science produced? Shall I have an opportunity to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* takes a very dim view of that?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has made his point already. I hope that, if he wants to make it again, he will do so during the debate on the Bill rather than in the debate on the timetable motion.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Is not this shambles the Government's own doing? I speak as one who has been here since half-past three this afternoon, and I heard the points of order just now from Tory Members of Parliament who never graced the Benches opposite. Now we have this shambles led by an inept Leader of the House. That is the reason for the rearrangement of business. That is why the programme should be reinstated.

Mr. MacGregor: In recent days there have been many points of order from the Labour party, but today points of order took up very little time.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): May I, as someone who has been here for most of the debate, ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that, by debating this matter again in prime time tomorrow, we shall enable the people of this country properly to understand the benefits that will flow from the Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend always takes a very great interest in educational matters, in which he is a great expert. He makes a very good point. The many excellent aspects of this Bill will be debated in the House tomorrow at a time when the public can be made aware of them. I am sure that that will be of great benefit.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I have been here all day and have contributed to the debate, and I expected the business to be disposed of tonight. In all the years I have been a Member of Parliament, I have never seen such a situation. I should like to put a simple question to you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Not to me.

Mr. Flannery: May I, then, ask the Leader of the House whether his Government are in some kind of mess?

Mr. MacGregor: Certainly not.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Has the Leader of the House taken fully into account the fact that the Government will be seen as having acted in a most cavalier fashion by their handling tomorrow of the revenue support grant and that this will cause a great deal of distress throughout local government? As the Leader of the House wishes to appear reasonable, will he tomorrow look at the *Official Report*, which will show that, in the early part of our proceedings, speeches were deliberately lengthened by means of extremely long interventions from the Government side? I rose to make a short speech in the earlier debate. There was a series of long interventions, including one that amounted to a speech by the Secretary of State. Given the Government's filibustering tactics——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No pointing, please.

Mr. Hardy: Given the filibustering tactics adopted by the Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman), and one or two others among the few Conservative Members who were in the Chamber, does the Leader of the House really think that his action could be described as reasonable?

Mr. MacGregor: I assure the hon. Gentleman that there were no filibustering tactics on this side of the House. I repeat the important point that we are giving more time to consideration of the Bill by allowing a second day of debate. I am sure that it is in the interests of the House to conclude consideration of the Bill in that way. As to the hon. Gentleman's point about revenue support grant, I acknowledge the importance of clarifying the situation, and I will do so tomorrow.

Mr. John Greenway (Rydale): Does my right hon. Friend recall that ,when the Bill received its Second Reading, it was rare to see Opposition Members in their places? That debate almost collapsed before 10 o'clock. However, many of my right hon. and hon. Friends participated in that debate, and I was one of them. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason for the Opposition's pathetic protest is that Labour realises that it has lost the initiative on education, and is now behind in the opinion polls?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes two good points, and he is right on both.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): No one is clear why the Government panicked at 10 o'clock this evening. It can be explained only by their desperation to get the Bill into the other place, in order to meet their timetable for a general election. The Leader of the House has organised a loss of Government time tomorrow for the revenue support grant orders for England and Wales, which we shall presumably now have to consider next week, when the Bill could have been completed in the early hours of the morning. Instead of all this nonsense, why do the Government not announce the date of the general election now?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that we have been endeavouring for several hours to have discussions on those matters and to reach a conclusion, so that it might have been possible to complete the Bill in the early hours. However, we were unable to do so. We are therefore giving the Bill an extra day, to ensure that it is properly considered.

The hon. Gentleman's point about the revenue support grant orders was very much in my mind. As he knows from our exchanges in business statements, I am anxious to accommodate all the pressures on the parliamentary timetable in agreement with the Opposition, and to meet their desire for supply days. The more days I lose, the more difficult it is to do that.

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member asked one question.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There must be some discipline in this place.

Dr. Cunningham: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order for me?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House is mistaken. There were no discussions about not suspending the 10 o'clock rule. What is more, there was no filibustering on this side of the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "He was not here."]

There are 31 Government amendments for debate on the Order Paper, and 44 Opposition amendments, so the idea that the Opposition have been delaying the passage of the Bill is complete nonsense—and the Leader of the House knows it. If the right hon. Gentleman had sought for one moment to discuss the matter through the usual channels—with me—as he did not seek to do, we might have resolved the problem and the Government could have had their Bill. This is about the Government panicking because of their general election timetable. It has nothing to do with this side of the House—and the right hon. Gentleman knows it.

Mr. MacGregor: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I say briefly—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is disgraceful behaviour.

Mr. MacGregor: The business statement has nothing to do with the point that the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) made. I am aware that discussions have been going on for some time. We have endeavoured, as I always endeavour, to accommodate the requests of Members on both sides for time and to enable the Government's legislation to get through in the best possible way.

Mr. George Howarth: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will not take the point of order.

Wing (Bypass)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10.30 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I should like to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic to a serious difficulty in my constituency over the proposed bypass for the village of Wing. If there were a traditional division of opinion in my constituency about the route of the bypass, I should not take the time of the House tonight, but that is not the position. The village is virtually united against the present proposal.

The proposal has a long history which has tried the patience of my constituents, who have had to live with uncertainty for so many years. A bypass was first mooted two decades ago. It has now grown like Topsy, but unlike Topsy it has grown into a monster. That monster is no longer a bypass—that is to say, a road which passes by the village. It has developed into a major trunk road which could have three lanes in each direction—a six-lane road verging on a motorway. It will go through the northern part of the village and divide part of the village from Burcott, which has become virtually part of the village.

The new road will not only have environmental effects—for example, it will disrupt the view of the Chilterns—but will pass close to elderly people's bungalows at Park Gate and residential areas in Moorlands road and Moorhills road. I have been there to examine the site and have seen that the proposed road will be within a few yards of those residential areas. People will be able to hear and smell the road. The idea that it might one day grow from a two-lane to a six-lane road is intolerable.

The main problem has been well summed up by the organisation called STRIVE, which stands for Stop Trunk Road Invading Village Environment. That sums up the problem. I stress that STRIVE is not an ad hoc organisation of amateurs. I have met the group several times. It includes professionals with experience of road engineering, who know what they are talking about, and they have given careful and balanced thought to the issues.

STRIVE has sound democratic roots, and has carried out a survey within the village, consulting 2,094 electors personally, of whom 1,418 replied—68 per cent., which is a high rate of reply. More than three quarters—78 per cent.—of those replying agreed that the road, which has developed into a major trunk route, should be further from the village.

What is the history? How did we get where we are today? In the early 1970s, it was decided that a close-in by-pass should be eliminated from the possibilities by the Department of Transport. That decision was taken because a close-in bypass would intrude into Wing park, because self-evidently it would have an impact on the village, and because the proposed route would have passed through a grade I ancient site.

In the early 1980s, a north route and a south route were proposed. To cut short on history, in 1989 a proposal to upgrade the Wing bypass into a new dual carriageway was included in the White Paper, "Roads for Prosperity".

The need for the road is contested by no one. Clearly it is of major strategic interest to the Government and to business to connect to the east ports of Felixstowe and Harwich. That is understood by my constituents, who are by no means backwoodsmen. They understand the

[Mr. George Walden]

commercial and transport rationale behind it. What they do not understand is how the road, which was originally a bypass, has been allowed to evolve in a somewhat organic way to the point where it will invade their village and their environment.

The real problem is that a number of interrelated schemes have been dealt with independently. The three schemes are as follows: first, the A418, Leighton to Linslade, southern bypass, which has been promoted by Bedfordshire county council. I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) has taken the trouble to be here for the debate. The Wing bypass is the second scheme, and is promoted by Buckinghamshire county council, and the A4146 Linslade western bypass, which is also promoted by that county council, is the third scheme.

The three separate schemes are obviously interrelated. The more strategic the roads become, the greater the need for them to be interrelated. However, they have not been interrelated in such a way as to allow the public to express their views or to propose alternative routes. As a result of the interrelating that has taken place, the meeting point of the three roads has been decided at a preconceived point—a roundabout. Obviously that limits the options open to dissenters, because it freezes the position, making it impossible for them to suggest alternatives, which can always be dismissed on the grounds that they do not tie in with the pre-arranged nodal point.

What we have had is a historical muddle—the organic growth of the bypass—plus an over-rigid reliance on this one meeting point. That is causing enormous irritation and frustration to my constituents. The Minister must take note of that.

To complicate matters still further, the Wing bypass is covered by section 272 of the Highways Act 1980 with the county council taking the lead. To the west, the Rowsham and Bierton bypass has the Department of Transport in the lead. There is an element of incoherence in this situation, as no one seems to have taken an overall look at where the road will go. Just as important, no one has considered the implications for the people who happen to live in its path.

To complicate matters still further I am informed that publication of the A418 west of Aylesbury to Wing proposals will be delayed until May 1992 so they will not be available to be seen in relationship to the proposed Wing bypass. Again, there is an element of fragmentation.

What will come out of all this is a de facto situation in which, because of the preconception about the meeting point of those roads, the way the project has evolved over time and the lack of co-ordinated planning between the two county councils—co-ordinated in a manner in which the public could get at the whole system and question the assumptions behind the bypass—the democratic right of my constituents to challenge the route has been effectively undercut. Therefore, what is needed is a joint public inquiry. For that reason, I propose that the Secretary of State should consider calling in that particular bypass.

My constituents have been extremely patient over the years as the route has evolved. They have lived with the uncertainty. There are obvious implications for the people of the village, whether the route goes to the north or the south—there have been plans for both options. All are agreed—I stress this—that the bypass must be taken further away from the village, but that can be done only if proper oversight is taken by the Department of Transport, which, after all, is funding the roads. This affair must not be allowed to continue to evolve in a higgledy-piggledy, patchwork way.

10.43 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): Over the past year, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) has sent me several letters from his constituents about the route of the Wing bypass. He and his constituents support the need for a bypass, but there is no consensus about the route that it should take.

Various routes have been examined to the north and south of Wing. Back in 1984, Buckinghamshire county council gave planning permission for a southern bypass. In 1989, the A418 through Wing was identified in the "Roads for Prosperity" White Paper as a local authority scheme which could form part of a strategic route linking the M40 with the M1. Traffic predictions warranted a dual carriageway and Buckinghamshire county council re-viewed the relative merits of alternative routes. This led to formal consultation by the county council in April 1991 on three options, one to the north and two to the south of the village.

In May 1991, the county highways sub-committee recommended southern route S2. An application seeking planning permission was submitted in December 1991 to the county and district council planning committees, and I understand that the application is likely to be considered in March. I neither wish nor intend to interfere in the local democratic decisions on this matter, although I am well aware of the concerns that some have expressed about S2.

It is probably inevitable that no route will please everybody. In 1983, an outer route north of Burcott was rejected by the county council. It would have gone along the south of a valley facing Wing and had a strong visual impact on the village. The April 1991 consultation carried out by the county council canvassed a northern route developed in conjunction with consultants representing Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, a prominent local landowner. His consultants have also since put forward a further alternative.

The county council's preferred route to the south has been criticised for going too close to Wing, having regard to the amount of traffic likely to be using the road, but an alternative route further to the south is criticised because it would be insufficiently attractive to traffic going between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury to bring maximum relief to Wing.

It has therefore been suggested by some that the county proposals be abandoned in favour of a scheme developed using trunk road procedures. But that would mean starting again from scratch, causing delay and prolonging uncertainty. The scheme has been revised once to take account of the wider implications of its national role and represents the refinement of prolonged and detailed studies.

Mr. Walden: Before my hon. Friend the Minister gets lost, may I point out that he said that further delays might be caused if the entire scheme were reviewed from scratch. I suspect that my villagers would prefer further delay to

having a four-lane, and potential six-lane, highway foisted on them, which would run very close to, if not through, some parts of the village.

Mr. Chope: I hear what my hon. Friend says. Ultimately, it is a matter for the local people in consultation with their elected representatives on the county council. Nothing would remove the need for a dual carriageway bypass of Wing. The traffic predictions show that a dual carriageway would be warranted. If the villagers want a bypass, it is inevitable that it will be a dual carriageway. The route for that bypass has already been the subject of a consultation, and the next stage in the planning process will be for the planning committee of Buckinghamshire county council to decide on the issue in March. Much argument remains prior to that meeting and it will not be an easy task for the county councillors because there is considerable opposition, as my hon. Friend has made clear to the House.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for the Environment has, potentially, the opportunity to use his powers under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to direct an authority to refer a planning application to him for his own personal decision. More generally, the county council has produced—as it is required to do—an environmental statement setting out the expected environmental impact and mitigation of the proposed road. That environmental statement is currently being considered by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Should the line of the route eventually receive planning permission, the next step for the county council would be to make draft side roads and compulsory purchase orders under the terms of the Highways Act 1980, probably by spring 1993. The public will have the opportunity to comment and object to the proposals. It seems likely, because of the level of concern, that a public inquiry would then be necessary. That inquiry would be conducted by an independent inspector appointed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and would have a forum for a full debate on the issues in great depth. It would give objectors an opportunity to express their views and enable alternative proposals to be examined and discussed.

This is a controversial scheme, but I hope that the county council, in conjunction with the representations made by my hon. Friend on behalf of his constituents and other local opinion, will be able to reach a conclusion that is reasonably satisfactory for all involved. Clearly, there is a demand for the uncertainty to be brought to an end as quickly as possible. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that the best people to bring that uncertainty to a conclusion are the Buckinghamshire county councillors who have carried the scheme forward so far and are much closer to local opinion—or should be—than is any other authority.

My hon. Friend is clearly concerned about the present position. He can ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment to call in the application. That could be done before the county council takes a decision in March of this year. I am sure that my hon Friend the Member for Buckingham will not be slow to draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should he wish to do so.

I do not think that I can add anything further this evening. The road has been promoted by the county council, although it has national implications. When it is built, it will be funded largely by the taxpayer. However, that does not mean that the Government are dictating which route should be taken. They are listening to the views of people and relying on the county council to choose the best option.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 30 January 1992

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for Third Reading read.
To be read the Third time on Thursday 6 February.

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER (GIROBANK) BILL *(By Order)*

BRITISH RAILWAYS (NO. 4) BILL *(By Order)*

CROSSRAIL BILL *(By Order)*

EAST COAST MAIN LINE SAFETY BILL *(By Order)*

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY (LEWISHAM, ETC.) (NO. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (GREEN PARK) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (JUBILEE) BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 6 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Trust Ports

1. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made in privatising the trust ports in Northern Ireland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): A proposal for a draft Order in Council, which would provide the necessary powers to enable any of Northern Ireland's trust ports to be privatised, is currently under preparation. It is scheduled for publication in the summer at which time all interested parties will have an opportunity to comment.

Mr. Field: I welcome my hon. Friend's answer, but will he ensure that the employees of the trust ports have an opportunity to purchase shares and partake in the wealth created, thereby furthering the Government's privatisation proposals and the extension of share ownership? Does he agree that those policies have constituted one of the successful planks of the social revolution in this country since 1979?

Mr. Needham: I can certainly confirm that it is our intention to ensure that the legislation contains proposals such as my hon. Friend suggested, just as there are in the legislation that applies to the rest of the country. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) will oppose our present privatisation proposal with the same degree of enthusiasm that he opposed the privatisation proposals introduced on Monday. I doubt whether he will have an opportunity to meddle in the affairs of the Northern Ireland ports, but, were he to do so, as he comes from Wigan his knowledge of the pier might be of assistance.

Mr. Beggs: What is the present level of grant paid to each of the port authorities in Northern Ireland? What change will be made to the level of grant paid to those ports which move from trust status to the private sector? When will we have a level playing field in Northern Ireland with fair competition between all ports?

Mr. Needham: We shall have a level playing field as long as the present Administration are able to continue their privatisation policy. The proposals adopted by the EC mean that 75 per cent. of grant is available to publicly owned or trust ports and, under the European regional development fund rules, 50 per cent. is available to privately owned ports. That is a matter for the EC and the Commission to decide, not the Government.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The Minister will have noted that other people have joined the anti-privatisation lobby in relation to electricity, as he will have discovered on Monday. There is great concern in Northern Ireland, especially following a report from a Committee of the House on land in the harbour region which was sold off cheaply when Harland and Wolff was privatised. Will the Minister assure the House that, whatever privatisation

plans he has for the trust ports, there will be no recognition of those people who seem to have an interest in cashing in on the endeavours for their own ends?

Mr. Needham: The Government have an obligation to Parliament and to the taxpayer to ensure maximum proceeds from any privatisation of land. Whether that happens ultimately will be a matter for the Public Accounts Committee to judge. There is great potential in the land around the port in Belfast and it is important that, when that land is sold, it is sold to a company capable of developing it to the best advantage of the people of Belfast and Northern Ireland.

New Roads, South Antrim

2. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total figure will be for new road schemes in the Antrim, South constituency for *(a)* 1992-93, *(b)* 1993-94 and *(c)* 1994-95.

Mr. Needham: Following an adjustment in planned expenditure, it is now intended to spent £0·5 million in 1993-94 on the construction of a slip road from the M2 motorway to ensure that it is in place when the new Antrim hospital opens. No expenditure will be incurred on major road schemes in the other two years.

Mr. Forsythe: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that very good reply. As he knows, the decision made at an earlier stage not to complete the slip road was considered to be ludicrous. Is he aware of the difficulties experienced on the part of the A26 that has not yet been dualled? Is he further aware that a number of patients from a wide area—indeed, from as distant as Larne—will be going to the hospital, meaning that good roads are essential to serve the hospital?

Mr. Needham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. My hon. Friend the Minister who is responsible for health in Northern Ireland is not able to be here today because he is on duty in the Province. He and I have had a series of meetings about the provision of the slip road, and he reminded me of an undertaking that I had given when Minister responsible for health matters a few years ago. So together we moved heaven and earth to ensure, in a difficult year, that the necessary money was made available.

I appreciate the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about the A26. He will be aware, bearing in mind the other pressures we have on the budget this year, how difficult it has been to get a higher priority for roads. So long as I am responsible for transport in Northern Ireland, I shall continue to fight that corner as best I can.

RUC Special Branch

3. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the staff resources available to the special branch of the RUC.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): In the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, this information is confidential.

Mr. Browne: I accept the need for secrecy in the matter. Is the Minister satisfied that the present staffing levels are sufficient to carry out the necessary pre-emptive intelligence work? When will the agreed 441 new RUC people be recruited?

Dr. Mawhinney: The Secretary of State announced in November, as my hon. Friend says, that the Chief Constable's request for 441 additional police officers would be met. The recruitment of those officers began immediately, and my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that more than 100 additional RUC and RUC reserve recruits were taken into training in December.

Mr. Maginnis: I am full of praise for the work that is being done by special branch in the RUC. Is the Minister aware that the best return for that good work is not being achieved in that shortcomings in the law allow the higher echelons of terrorist organisations—their command and control structures—to remain free to walk the streets with impunity, despite the fact that the RUC has provided high-grade intelligence about those people? Is he further aware that, in the wake of the Nelson trial, it is important to ensure that absolute primacy of the RUC in delivering law and order to the people of Northern Ireland?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the compliment that he paid to the special branch and to the RUC. I am sure that it is shared on both sides of the House, as it is from the Dispatch Box. If the hon. Gentleman, who is a considerable expert in these matters, thinks that specific aspects of the law should be addressed, I shall be happy to hear from him.

Mr. Mallon: Does the Minister agree that in any society, the public interest requires a system of law enforcement and justice that all can support and in which all can have confidence? Does he believe that that is possible in Northern Ireland, when some sections of the security services are colluding with terrorists, when they are using terrorists as agents while they are involved in terrorist activity and when some members of the security services are handing out confidential security documents as though they were pen-pal photographs? What changes will he and the Secretary of State demand so that the integrity of the law can be protected from some of those who are charged with enforcing it?

Dr. Mawhinney: I listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's remarks, the latter part of which related to a court case that has not yet been concluded, so it would be inappropriate and imprudent of me to comment on it now. My answer to the first part of his question is that in the few weeks that I have had my present portfolio, two or three times in public I have stated my firm belief that it is in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, the police and the security forces—indeed, in the interests of all of us —that the law be applied even-handedly and that those responsible for applying the law should do so.

Mr. McNamara: Can the Minister assure the House that he entirely supports the primacy of the police in all security matters? If so, will he now state to the House that the police are, and should always be, in control of all intelligence operations in Northern Ireland? So that all sections of the community can have confidence in the security forces, will the Government undertake to make a statement to the House after the conclusion of the Nelson case?

Dr. Mawhinney: I have already made my position clear in regard to the Nelson case, and I have nothing more to add. As for the primacy of the police, the view of Ministers is that that is not in question.

Economic Prospects

4. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the future prospects for the Northern Ireland economy.

Mr. Needham: Although Northern Ireland's economic prospects are closely linked to those of the rest of the United Kingdom, the Northern Ireland economy has fared better than that of almost any other United Kingdom region in recent years. As the national economy moves out of recession, Northern Ireland is therefore well placed to take advantage of the economic upturn.

Mr. Trimble: As the Minister says, the Northern Ireland economy is closely linked to that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Experience has tended to show that its pattern moves somewhat behind that of the United Kingdom in terms of time. The rest of the United Kingdom now seems to be beginning to move out of recession; is it not true that Northern Ireland is about to move deeper into it? Would the Minister care to comment on a recent report by Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—a firm of consultants on which the Government normally rely—which states that industrial output is likely to decline by between 2 and 4 per cent. this year, and that unemployment may increase by some 10,000 as a result?

Mr. Needham: That may have been true until the current recession, but the hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong about the present circumstances. Whereas in the past Northern Ireland was always the furthest point on the beach that the tide reached, and therefore the first point that it left, on this occasion we entered the recession later and weathered it better. The unemployment figures demonstrate that Northern Ireland was the only part of the United Kingdom that experienced no increase in unemployment; the Cambridge econometric forecast shows that last year it was the only region that experienced any growth, and that this year it is likely to be one of four regions that will experience growth.

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte is probably the worst of a lot of very bad forecasters. For example, it forecast an increase in unemployment of 3,000 for 1986-87; in fact unemployment fell by 6,800. It forecast a decrease of 5,000 for 1987-88; in fact, the decrease was 7,800. It forecast a fall of 3,000 for 1988-89; the actual decrease was 9,500. Perhaps economic forecasters and consultants should consider the beam in their own eye before criticising the Government's figures.

Rev. William McCrea: My constituency has the second highest unemployment in the United Kingdom. Does not the Minister realise that the unemployment figures in the Province are deplorable? Young people face lengthening dole queues. Will the Minister tell the House and the people of the Province what measure he intends to take to assist people over 45 whose age condemns them to humiliating interviews and, indeed, rejection? Many of them have done excellent work in the past.

Mr. Needham: The Government's job training programme includes a series of measures to assist those over the age of 25, and to ensure that they can receive an element of training. The same applies to the young unemployed. I agree with everything that the hon. Gentleman has said about the unacceptable level of unemployment in Northern Ireland. I do not wish to convey a sense of complacency; I am merely saying that the Northern Ireland economy has done very much better in the latest recession—and would have done better still had it not been for the appalling IRA atrocities that make inward investment so difficult.

Mr. Jim Marshall: This was the first time that I have heard the Minister quote figures with any satisfaction. I clearly understood why when I heard how they confirmed his view of the economy in Northern Ireland. He is an isolated figure in the Government because he is the first Minister whom I have heard speak highly of the work of the Cambridge school. Perhaps he should get in step with the rest of the Government.

Does the Minister agree that if those projects that are partly funded by the European Community fund do not proceed this year, there is a danger that there will be some damage to the economy of Northern Ireland? Does he further accept that this arises from the Government's refusal to accept European Community rules on additionality? If he accepts both those propositions, what pressure is the Northern Ireland Office putting on the Government to conform to those European Community rules?

Mr. Needham: The Government have always abided by, and agreed with, the additionality rules as far as they apply to Northern Ireland. It is unacceptable to us that there should be any withholding of funds due to Northern Ireland. As the hon. Gentleman has rightly pointed out, those funds are of importance to us in the provision of our capital infrastructure, although they are not totally significant.

I can quote a final figure to the hon. Gentleman, as he enjoys my quoting figures. It is that, according to the Department of Employment figures, if the Labour party's economic proposals for a minimum wage were put into effect it would cost some 2 million jobs, of which 50,000 would be in Northern Ireland, where we have a large number of women workers in the clothing, textile and garment industries. The hon. Gentleman's advancement to the ministerial Dispatch Box would be a disaster for employment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: Will my hon. Friend further underline that the greatest threat to the economic prosperity of both the Province and the Republic of Ireland is terrorism? Will he emphasise again and again that the victims of terrorism are not just those who are maimed, injured and killed but the many people who are put on the dole because terrorism deters investment from elsewhere in Europe?

Mr. Needham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All of us who have been involved in trying to increase employment in Northern Ireland know the damage that terrorism does to our chances of achieving that aim. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) has, much more eloquently than I could, told us of the damage that it does and the effect that it has on the young people of Northern

Ireland because it gives them a future of either migration or unemployment. That is the hideous hypocrisy of the IRA's campaign.

Housing Executive

5. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the funding of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Mr. Needham: The total resources available to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1992-93 will be around £483 million. These substantial resources will enable the executive to continue the progress that it has made in recent years in improving housing conditions in Northern Ireland.

Mr. McGrady: I thank the Minister for his reply. Does he agree that the cut of £19·9 million from £262 million in the 1992-93 budget is a dramatic reduction given that the proposal for the programme of building and house repairs in Northern Ireland agreed by the Government was already the lowest in the history of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive? Is he aware that there are 23,000 people on the waiting list—10,000 in urgent need—and that urban regeneration will be set back? Allied to this is the disastrous state of the building and construction industry. Can I encourage the Minister to do the double by restoring the funding so as to enable much-needed house building and repairs to go ahead, and at the same time give the necessary financial boost to the devastated building and construction industry?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the record of this Government on housing in Northern Ireland since 1979 is without parallel. Any visitors who come to the Province can see the quality of public housing in Northern Ireland. The urgent waiting list has reduced from some 18,800 in 1981 to 9,900 in 1991. The amount of new housing in Northern Ireland, as everyone can see, has changed the housing situation from one of the worst in Europe to one of the best in Europe. That does not mean that we do not still have problems in rural areas.

The hon. Gentleman knows well that the Government must order their priorities and he knows the extent of construction needed after buildings have been bombed. Therefore, we must all continue to point out that the bombing of houses, bridges and roads inevitably impacts on our ability to find funds elsewhere. The construction industry in Northern Ireland is not in a disastrous decline—private house building has maintained its growth rate and has the best record anywhere in the country.

Mr. Kilfedder: A colossal number of Housing Executive dwellings in my constituency are in urgent need of renovation—I am thinking of the housing estates at Tullycarnet, Ballybeen, Groomsport, Bangor and Holyrood. May I urge the Minister to give sufficient funds to the Housing Executive to enable the work to go ahead without further delay?

Mr. Needham: I have explained to the hon. Gentleman why the funding for the Housing Executive is not as easy this year as it has perhaps been in former years. I take his point about maintenance and I shall of course draw it to the Housing Executive's attention. It is the Housing Executive's responsibility to determine how it spends the funds that the Government make available to it. I say again that in Northern Ireland the Housing Executive has spent a great deal more per capita than is the case elsewhere and that can be seen by anyone who visits public sector housing in Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Ross: Will the Minister ensure that when the Housing Executive engages in new build it will incorporate in every scheme a large number of two-bedroomed bungalows and a number of houses especially built to cater for the needs of the disabled? That would allow a tremendous movement of people from under-utilised accommodation to smaller accommodation and would allow many people who have been on the waiting list for council houses for many years to be moved into smaller accommodation. It would create a domino effect across the board.

Mr. Needham: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. I am sure that the Housing Executive will want to consider it and I shall personally bring it to its attention.

Mr. Stott: There is no doubt about the high quality of housing stock that has been built by the Housing Executive in Northern Ireland and every time I see it I am envious and wish that I had some of it in Wigan. Will the Minister confirm what my hon. Friend the Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) said, which was that the Housing Executive has lost about £19 million of funding for 1991-92 and that that will have a serious effect on new build? It is alleged that those cuts are occasioned by the additional costs of dealing with terrorism. Will he confirm that the Housing Executive believes that during the period 1992-95 it will lose a further £50 million from its anticipated budget if the cuts are not restored? That would have a disastrous effect on waiting lists in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Every year that I have been Minister with responsibility for housing—it is now six years—the Housing Executive has suggested an amount which it hopes that the Government will give it, while knowing perfectly well that it will not get all that it asks for. The figures to which the hon. Gentleman refers are not those proposed by the Government but those which the Housing Executive says that it could spend. The actual reduction is about £7 million. Although I should have preferred there to be no reduction, the fact that the priorities within the Northern Ireland block are law, order and security inevitably means that there are consequences which fall to other matters, and housing is one. The important point is that on which the hon. Gentleman put his finger—the quality of housing in Northern Ireland. As it improves and as housing unfitness is reduced, there is less need to spend so much on it, which allows resources to be spent elsewhere.

Investment

7. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the value of inward investment in Northern Ireland since 1979.

Mr. Needham: Since 1983 selective financial assistance totalling £104 million has been offered to projects with a

total forecast investment of nearly £320 million. Comprehensive figures for non-assisted projects and for the years 1979-83 are not available.

Mr. Coombs: It would be idle to speculate on what the figures might have been if it were not for the security situation. Can my hon. Friend say whether the recent bombing campaign has had any impact on prospects for future investment, and whether any new initiatives are under consideration to boost the figures further?

Mr. Needham: All the statutory agencies in Northern Ireland do whatever they can to boost investment. Clearly, the recent bombing campaign in Northern Ireland does not help our attempts to attract inward investment, but all parties in the House, as part of a Northern Ireland team, work together on ways of trying to get more investment. We have been most successful in the past few years in attracting investment from 18 countries. The IRA campaign leaves an image which is a travesty of the reality of life in Northern Ireland. People who visit always seem astonished by the normalcy of the life of the vast majority of the people most of the time. It would sometimes help if that normalcy were a little better portrayed by the likes of such as the BBC and by those journalists who earn their living by reporting only violence.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Minister agree that the best prospect of reaching and sustaining adequate inward investment will arise only when right hon. and hon. Members representing the people of Northern Ireland put aside their petty differences and continue talks with the Secretary of State to bring the violence in the Province to an end?

Mr. Needham: Whatever differences may or may not exist, it is erring on the side of arrogance to suggest that they are petty. The differences are deep and go far back into history, but while I have been a Minister dealing with the economy and the environment I have always had the greatest possible collaboration from all the parties in Northern Ireland, which have always worked cheek by jowl with one another and with me for the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland. I commend the politicians of Northern Ireland for doing that.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Will the Minister keep in mind the fact that there is a roadblock on investment in the construction industry because of the problem of landlocking? There is a big case of investment being held up in Ahoghill, and it is also being held up in Carrickfergus, and other places, too. Will the Minister undertake to consider that problem seriously?

Mr. Needham: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Mallon: I hope that I shall not embarrass the Minister if I commend him again for his imaginative efforts and the time that he has spent abroad trying to develop inward investment. When he considers the figures for the past 10 years, does he have any plans for structural changes involving inward investment teams, especially in the United States? While we await the outcome of the general election, does he have any plans to discuss with the Northern Ireland parties how best we can all further inward investment? Despite what are often called our petty differences, inward investment is something on which we all agree.

Mr. Needham: I should very much like the opportunity to discuss with the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends, and other colleagues from Northern Ireland, how we can introduce a strategy for promoting inward investment over a longer time scale than that hitherto adopted. If the hon. Gentleman's words were an invitation to me, I shall take up that invitation.

I commend the hon. Gentleman for his work on the link between Pittsburgh and Newry. That is a good case history, which shows a way forward by building confidence between potential overseas investors and parts of Northern Ireland. I am sure that we can build on that and that it will be ever more successful.

Security

8. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Belfast.

Dr. Mawhinney: The security situation in Belfast is kept under constant review and the size and disposition of the security force effort there are adjusted as necessary. In recent weeks, a number of additional measures have been introduced and the security forces have had considerable success in disrupting planned terrorist activity.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. May I pass on to him some of the comments made to me by people I know in Belfast? They have welcomed the increased presence of our defence forces in their beleaguered city. May I draw to my hon. Friend's attention a report in the *Sunday Express* pointing out that paramilitaries convicted of bombing and murder are sheltering in the Republic are drawing more than £2 million per week in dole money and social security, paid for by the British taxpayer, while many would face reconviction if they returned to Ulster? Will my hon. Friend please look into the matter because those people are living off the system that they seek to destroy with their bombs and bullets?

Dr. Mawhinney: I know of my hon. Friend's deep interest in the affairs of the Province and I thank her for it. I am aware of the speculative piece to which she refers. An individual's entitlement to social security benefit, including whether or not he or she receives benefit, is confidential information. I confirm that all claims to benefit are treated strictly in accordance with the law, and benefit would not be paid to any person unless the entitlement was valid.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Will the Minister comment on the proposal to close the strategically placed Royal Ulster Constabulary station at Springfield parade in north-west Belfast?

Dr. Mawhinney: No, but if the hon. Gentleman has views that he would like to express to me on that closure, I should be delighted to hear from him.

Mr. Hume: Will the Minister ask the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) to get her facts right and stop promoting bias in the House? Will he remind her that 98 per cent. of all people convicted of crimes of violence in Northern Ireland are residents of Northern Ireland?

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman has made his own effective point in his own effective way. Having read the article, I admit that aspects of it caused my eyebrows to rise.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can Her Majesty's Ministers use the time before there is any question of political talks resuming to take the initiative in the security situation in Belfast and elsewhere in the Province? For normal political life to be maintained in Northern Ireland, is it not critical to defeat terrorism, and must not that defeat come before political changes or constitutional arrangements?

Dr. Mawhinney: My hon. Friend makes a fair point, but he would wish to put it in the context of the fact that security policy works alongside political, economic and social policy. There is no quick fix to defeat terrorism in Northern Ireland. My hon. Friend should be in no doubt, however, that we have that commitment. May I encourage him by telling him that the Chief Constable's view is that four out of every five planned terrorist incidents in Northern Ireland are thwarted before they take place? Last year, we took 400 people to court charged with terrorist-related offences, including 38 for murder. My hon. Friend will have welcomed the substantial arms and explosives finds in Belfast just a few weeks ago.

Rathlin Island

9. **Ms. Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in providing Rathlin island with mains electricity.

Mr. Needham: Preparations to provide mains electricity on Rathlin island are progressing satisfactorily, and supply is expected to be available to consumers in September.

Ms. Hoey: I am pleased at the progress on that issue, but may I ask the Minister now to look urgently at the decision to allow a Scottish ferry company to run the ferry between Rathlin and Ballycastle? Does he realise that the islanders have run the ferry for many years and that until this year they received not a penny of subsidy, unlike the Scottish ferries? Why does he wish to take away the Rathliners' jobs? Will he please look at this urgently and change his decision?

Mr. Needham: Absolutely no decision of any sort has been made as regards the introduction of Cal-Mac. The hon. Lady knows those ferry owners as well as I do. I have made it perfectly clear to the ferry owners in Rathlin that we shall do nothing without discussing it with them and the islanders' development and community association. Those discussions have been going on with everyone involved. We need to ensure that we get a ferry between Rathlin and Ballycastle which can operatate the whole year round and open the island much more to tourist traffic and economic development. We are having the ferry company over to see how it works, but no decision has been made. We shall look at this very carefully and have discussions with the current owners and with everybody on the island before anything is decided.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend accept that there will be a welcome across the House for his response to the questions? It is important to have both mains electricity and improvements to the harbours at Ballycastle and Church Bay. There will be a great welcome for the fact that there will be discussions with Richard Green and others who have kept Rathlin linked to the main part of Northern Ireland all these years.

Mr. Needham: I thank my hon. Friend, and give to the House the absolute commitment that nothing will be done on Rathlin island without the fullest possible co-operation with all the islanders and their association. Nothing will be imposed by the Department of the Environment without my having the closest opportunity to discuss all this with the islanders and their representatives myself.

Military Conflict

10. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the prospects for an early settlement to the military conflict in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Brooke): The actions of terrorists in Northern Ireland cannot be dignified with the description "military conflict". Peace will come when the terrorists realise, as they must, that they will never be allowed to prevail.

Mr. Hain: There is widespread admiration for the Secretary of State's persistence in tackling paramilitary terrorism and for his patience over the political talks. May I put to him the comments on BBC television this week of the commanding officer of bloody Sunday, Lieutenant Colonel Derek Wilford, who said that the present Government's policies and those of their predecessors had failed completely? Is there not a case for an entirely new agenda of constitutional talks, involving all elected representatives of both north and south, to agree a solution to this crisis? Otherwise we shall have 23 more years of killing and destruction.

Mr. Brooke: I am conscious how, whenever we come to one of these sad anniversaries in Northern Ireland, those who have participated in Northern Ireland affairs in the past make their contributions to the current debate. As for talks, the party leaders and I issued a statement earlier this week. I think that there is hope and expectation on the part of us all that we shall be able to come back into talks after the general election.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend accept that to deal with military conflicts in the Province British troops must be able to deal with the Irish Republican Army in a professional, military way, without their hands being tied behind their backs for political reasons? Does he further agree that people in the Province deserve equally high standards of security and protection from terrorism as those who live on the mainland?

Mr. Brooke: I have already remarked on the phrase "military conflict". As to my hon. Friend's comment that the security forces should be allowed to operate without constraint from political considerations, I can give a categorical assurance that no such restraint for political reasons will be imposed. The security forces will, however, always operate under the rule of the law.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Secretary of State remember that in Northern Ireland Question Time on 12 December he and I shared a concern about the build-up of munitions and arms as far south as Limerick for trans-shipment to

Northern Ireland, as unfortunately happened? Does he feel that he might try to persuade Mr. Collins at their next meeting to devote a little more time to the containment of that particular problem rather than wasting it on demands that a policeman accompany every Army patrol in Northern Ireland, presumably to ensure that the Special Air Services remember to say "please" and "thank you" to any civilian they may encounter?

Mr. Brooke: I had the opportunity to discuss the matter that the right hon. Gentleman has raised at the conference this week. The Minister of Justice, who of course accompanies the Minister for Foreign Affairs to these conferences, is fully seized—as is the Commissioner of the Garda—of the necessity to identify the whereabouts of the arsenal because of its profound value to the IRA.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the current security situation in Northern Ireland illustrates the irresponsibility of those who oppose the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act?

Mr. Brooke: I have said before from the Dispatch Box that the attitude of other parties in the House to that Act is a matter for them rather than for me.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Secretary of State assure the House that after the election and in the event of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) forming a Government, the right hon. Gentleman will support that Government in seeking to revive the talks on the basis of the three strands that have been the basis of his patient talks over the past two years? At the conclusion of the Nelson case, will the Secretary of State make a statement to the House about the supremacy of the rule of law in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: I hesitate to correct the hon. Gentleman's pronunciation, but in my day I fought the constituency of Islwyn which is now represented by the Leader of the Opposition, and I can tell him that it is pronounced "Issloin". In the unlikely event of an alternative Administration being returned to power and seeking to get talks started, on the basis of my experience over the past two years I wish the hon. Gentleman well. In response to the hon. Gentleman's second question, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, made it perfectly clear that we will not make any comment whatever on that case while it is proceeding.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been having important discussions today with President Yeltsin, who is on his first visit abroad as President of an independent Russia. My right hon. Friend will be meeting President Bush this evening after my right hon. Friend's arrival in New York to chair a meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. Jones: I am sorry that I so rattled the Prime Minister with my question at the previous Prime Minister's Question Time that he has not come to the House today. As the Institute for Fiscal Studies spring budget report shows that Government borrowing is likely to reach £20 billion next year, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm or deny that the Prime Minister and his Chancellor have reneged on their promises to balance the books?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will have to await the Budget statement on matters relating to his question. As is absolutely clear, we have made our spending plans public. They are set out in detail and we have indicated how they are paid for. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made that clear on Tuesday. I note that the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers says:

"Labour, if elected, would have little scope for increased spending in the early years unless it were willing to increase taxes by more than it has indicated."

The country now says, "And how!"

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that too often we lose sight of the fact that the national health service was born as a result of co-operation between three parties? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that the founders of the health service would be horrified at the resistance to the reforms so ably carried out by the Government for the benefit of patients throughout the country?

Mr. MacGregor: I entirely agree. It is clear that we have not only substantially increased expenditure on the national health service but that we are the only party proposing credible reforms, the results of which are already showing. I assume that that is why a consultant, who is the nephew of a distinguished former socialist in the House, said yesterday:

"I do not believe the health service would be safe in Labour's hands."

Mr. Hattersley: When the Prime Minister said on Tuesday that if the Conservatives were re-elected they would not increase VAT, was he giving the House and the country a categorical assurance?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend made the position absolutely clear on Tuesday.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Leader of the House aware that the Prime Minister also made the position categorically clear on 6 April, when he said:

"No honest Government could give a categorical assurance that they would not increase VAT. No Government ever has, and no Government ever will."

Was the Prime Minister telling the truth last Tuesday or last April?

Mr. MacGregor: What my right hon. Friend said on Tuesday is:

"There will be no VAT increase . . . we have published our spending plans and there is no need for us to raise VAT to meet them."—[*Official Report*, 28 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 808.]

That is absolutely clear, and it is in clear contrast to the position of the Labour party, which maintains its high spending policies and is all over the place in deciding how to finance them.

Mr. Hattersley: It is absolutely clear that the Leader of the House has either no authority or insufficient courage to say whether that promise was categorical or whether it was

what the country believes it to have been—evidence of a Prime Minister panicked into making a promise that he has no intention of keeping. Is not the truth about Tory policy on VAT revealed in the party's latest campaign document—that the way to raise taxes is "Wait until they spend the money as that is the right moment to tax them"?

Mr. MacGregor: I repeat that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the position absolutely clear, as we have done on many occasions. It is also clear that in the last two weeks the whole country, as it heard different voices and different noises, has wondered who is speaking for the Labour party. Indeed, on Sunday the right hon. Gentleman was proposing that Labour's recession package should be introduced after the recession had ended.

Mr. Dykes: Has my hon. Friend noticed that in recent weeks, as the public have been able to assess our present policies and our future policy offerings, there has been a very sharp and noticeable increase in our opinion poll ratings? That is not just a coincidence. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the opinion poll improvement in the past few weeks reflects not only our excellent policy range but the fact that the election is getting closer and the best is yet to come?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree that as we unfold our positive policies over the next few weeks, and as the electorate sees more and more of what Labour is offering—or not offering—what my hon. Friend has suggested will come about.

Q2. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. McAvoy: The Cabinet is split from top to bottom over the Prime Minister's policy of using Common Market grants for tax cuts instead of for the provision of help to deprived areas. Will the Leader of the House confirm the report in yesterday's *Financial Times* that the rules for allocating this money were changed in 1988 with the approval of the Government, and will he give an immediate assurance that the new rules will be obeyed? Why should Britain's areas of highest unemployment suffer because of Tory party internal divisions?

Mr. MacGregor: There are no internal Tory party divisions. The position on the particular issue to which the hon. Gentleman refers is that for some years now we have pursued the same policy that the money has been, in the formula applied, additional and is reflected in higher public spending plans, and that it is for the Commissioner to honour the pledge that we have had for years past.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Has my right hon. Friend noticed in the past few days the widespread support for our plans to seek better-quality services from councils? Has he noticed that much advice has been given to us on how that should be done? Some of the advice is bizarre. Will he confirm that he will reject advice to use as a role model councils such as Lambeth, Liverpool, Hackney and Southwark—in other words, councils which have high borrowing, rotten services and high community charges and which have lost control of their housing stock, and all of which are run by the Labour party?

Mr. MacGregor: It is clear that nearly all of the 10 worst councils in terms of rent collection and houses left empty are Labour controlled. It is also clear that many of the high-spending authorities are Labour. The country will draw its own conclusion that under a Labour Administration there are great inefficiencies, high spending and high taxation.

Q3. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Further to the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), and given the obvious confusion among Ministers about the implications of their electoral promises for the future level of value added tax, can the Leader of the House conjure up the actual figure for value added tax when his Government came to office in June 1979, and the level now as they go out of office?

Mr. MacGregor: We have, of course, in addition undertaken a considerable change—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I intend to answer. We have undertaken a considerable change from direct to indirect taxes, which is absolutely right because it enables many more people to spend their money as they wish. That is the policy which we have pursued consistently, with the result that direct taxation has come down substantially. However, we did not have the very high rates on many goods such as television sets, which are described as luxury goods but are essentials for many people—rates which we inherited and which I understand that the Labour party would consider again.

May Day

Q4. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has for the future of the May day bank holiday.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to change the present public holiday arrangements, although we shall continue to keep the situation under review.

Mr. Field: Why do we not throw off this hangover of socialism and instead celebrate a free enterprise day, a British export day or, better still, a low taxation day? Does my right hon. Friend agree that those who think that high taxation is the answer to recession are about to try to convince the electorate that suffocation is a form of first aid?

Mr. MacGregor: On the question about May day being a bank holiday, I can give my hon. Friend some comfort. Although I know that my hon. Friend is interested in switching it to the autumn, we have no plans to do that because there are different views about it. I think that he will agree nevertheless that on May day, instead of celebrating socialism, we now celebrate the end of socialism.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Will the Lord President of the Council, as a fellow Scot, tell me whether he has had the opportunity to study in depth the implications of the ICM opinion poll?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sadly, the question is about May day.

Engagements

Q5. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bellingham: Will the Leader of the House find time today to plan a journey from south Norfolk to north-west Norfolk to look at the local health services? He is welcome to bring with him Sir Roy Griffiths. He will see that a number of general practitioner practices have become fundholders, that a local NHS trust has already reduced waiting lists by 1,200 in the last year, and that a district authority is about to merge with a neighbour to give itself more clout. Are not those the results of Tory policies working for the benefit of patients?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right. The same is happening in west Norfolk, as well as throughout the country. As a result of the reforms, already in a very short period we see improved services, shortened waiting lists, and so on. Interestingly, we are also seeing increasing support for the reforms from the medical profession itself and increasing take-up of them.

Mr. Redmond: Will the Leader of the House convey to the Prime Minister the request that he restore to Back Benchers—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not know what the hilarity is about, but please carry on.

Mr. Redmond: —the right to examine Government legislation and that he stop the appalling use of the guillotine which stifles it?

Mr. MacGregor: We shall be discussing that matter in a short while. I shall make plain our position on today's business.

Q6. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is evidence of the growing success of the Government's education reforms that this year 28,800 people have enrolled for teacher training courses—20 per cent. more than last year and the best figure for 15 years? Is that not in stark contrast with the cynical disregard for educational standards shown by those Labour Members who filibustered on the parents charter Bill last night?

Mr. MacGregor: Later today we shall be able to debate further the great improvement in standards that we are achieving as a result of our reforms. My hon. Friend draws attention to one of them. I am delighted with the considerable increase in the number coming forward for teacher training. It reflects the fact that we have considerably improved the salary prospects and career prospects of teachers as a result of all the steps that we have taken in recent years.

Q7. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bennett: Will the Leader of the House confirm that although few people in Britain would expect the Prime Minister to match President Yeltsin bottle for bottle, they will find it odd that the Government insist on increasing or doubling Britain's nuclear fire power when both the Russians and the Americans see good reasons for cutting theirs?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue and I want to make the position clear. We welcome the proposals to reduce the super-power arsenals. They are wonderful news for all of us. We must hope that the current plans are implemented. But let us be perfectly clear about the scale of what is involved. The present arsenal of the former Soviet republics is 27,000 warheads, and it will take them many years to implement the current proposals. Even at the end of that process, they will have thousands of nuclear weapons. Our deterrent involves one boat on patrol at all times with no more than 128 warheads. So the scale is very different. I believe that the whole country thinks that with the uncertainties in the world—in the middle east and elsewhere, as well as in the Soviet Union—and looking ahead to the next 10 years, it is essential that we maintain our minimum credible nuclear deterrent.

Natural Gas (Imports)

3.32 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on the Government's decision to authorise further imports of natural gas.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): It has been the Government's object to create the market conditions within which competition can work for the benefit of all participants, suppliers, transporters and consumers. Important progress has been made in Britain. The Oil and Gas (Enterprise) Act 1982 and the Gas Act 1986 opened pipelines to competition on the basis of what is now called third-party access and provided for appropriate regulation by the Office of Gas Supply. Under the regulatory regime established when British Gas was privatised, steps taken in response to identified market problems have led over recent years to a growing number of companies supplying gas to industrial customers in competition with British Gas. Additional measures now being discussed will contribute to this process.

The United Kingdom has large reserves of gas on its continental shelf, and liberalisation of the market has provided a spur to their development. The Government support the European Commission's efforts to bring the benefits of liberalisation to the wider market of the Community and to remove barriers to competition and obstacles to trade. A market in which gas moves freely across frontiers and competes its way freely to final consumers provides the best assurance for all, including the emerging market economies of eastern Europe, the continued development of which will bring the environmental attractions of gas within reach of the widest public.

Until now, the United Kingdom has lacked the necessary gas transport links with the European market. I am pleased to say that several companies have told my Department that they would be interested in building a gas interconnector between the United Kingdom and the continent to enable UKCS gas to reach continental markets in competition with other gas suppliers to continental Europe. Six companies—British Gas, BP, Conoco, Elf, Norsk Hydro and Statoil—have now come together to conduct the first stage of a feasibility study on a gas interconnector between the United Kingdom and Europe.

At the suggestion of the companies, it was decided that the group would benefit from having an independent chairman with experience of the oil and gas business. Mr. Geoffrey H. Chipperfield, CB, former permanent secretary at the Department of Energy and currently permanent secretary and chief executive of the Property Services Agency, has accepted an invitation to chair the study, which is now under way. The Government believe that other companies will wish to participate in the full feasibility study when it is launched, and opportunities for this will be opened later in the year.

At the same time, two proposals for the import of Norwegian gas have been put to my Department. National Power proposes to contract a supply equivalent to the consumption of a single power station. Statoil also proposes to negotiate a supply of gas to an independent power generation project in Britain.

In addition to these developments on exports and imports, BP, Statoil and Norsk Hydro propose to establish a joint venture United Kingdom gas marketing company, which will work for increased gas competition in both the industrial and the power generation markets in Britain. I welcome this move.

These developments will make a significant contribution to the opening up of competition and gas trade. We are confident that United Kingdom gas suppliers will benefit considerably from the liberalisation of gas trade throughout Europe.

Mr. Dobson: This is another fine mess that the Government's shortsighted policies have got the country into. *[Interruption.]* I ask hon. Gentlemen who are moaning why Britain, of all countries, should have to import more natural gas. The Government have encouraged the dash for gas, which the privatised electricity companies want to burn in power stations. As a result, the demand for gas in this country now exceeds Britain's own natural gas supplies. Where there was abundance, the Government's policies have created shortage.

Will the Minister confirm that, on present plans by the electricity companies, the amount of gas to be burnt in power stations will be as great as that used in the whole of the rest of British industry, and that British industry will have to pay higher gas prices as a result?

Is it not true that gas prices for domestic customers have risen by no less than 14 per cent. in the past two years and will rise still further, because the power companies' demand is driving up the price of bulk supplies of gas and will continue to do so?

Will the Minister tell us how much these additional gas imports will add to the trade deficit? Is it not true that Britain already has a trade deficit in energy and that this decision will make that deficit worse? I hope that the Minister will not quote his Secretary of State's totally misleading statistics in his recent press release, pretending that we have an energy surplus.

Is it not true that, as a result of the Government's policies and the self-same privatised generating companies that want to import natural gas, coal imports last year hit record levels, and that the generating companies plan even more coal imports?

Will the Minister confirm that his Secretary of State recently advocated dependence in future on gas supplies not just from Norway but from the Gulf, the former Soviet Union and Algeria? If so, what price does he give for security of supply?

Finally, the Government keep knuckling under to the selfish demands of the privatised electricity companies. Is it not about time that the Government reminded the bosses of those companies that they should consider the long-term interests of the people of this country instead of just lining their own pockets? If this dying Tory Government will not tell them, the incoming Labour Government will.

Mr. Moynihan: I am surprised by that tirade from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), not least because the pipeline through which the gas will be imported is the Frigg line, which resulted from the Frigg treaty, negotiated by his right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who was then Secretary of State for Energy. Also, the production of the Frigg field—which

the right hon. Member for Chesterfield signed for—increased from nothing to a plateau of nearly 10 billion cu m of Norwegian gas per year under the last Labour Government, without any concern for export potential. If one adds together all the gas that we are discussing, the imports could total less than half of the amount which resulted from the Labour Government's desire and drive for imported Norwegian gas. So the House should get that into perspective.

The important thing is that we are announcing opportunities for a highly competitive United Kingdom gas industry to export in markets which are sufficiently attractive to warrant great interest from a large number of companies, and key companies have come forward to undertake a feasibility study. They will be in a position to win long-term contracts when the export link—the interconnector—is built. The hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras was also wrong about the trade deficit in energy, as there is a surplus.

In conclusion, I have this answer to the hon. Gentleman's questions—our objective, if it is to be in the interests of consumers, must be to work towards trade in gas in a genuine free market throughout Europe. We are confident that United Kingdom suppliers will benefit considerably from the liberalisation of the gas trade throughout Europe. Ultimately and most importantly, not only suppliers will benefit, but consumers.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that this is a private notice question and not a statement, although it sounded a little like one. I shall allow questions to continue until 3.55 pm; then we must move on to Business Questions.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): Is my hon. Friend aware that many of my hon. Friends will welcome his statement because the importation of gas will allow more competition in the electricity supply industry and will be good for the environment, because gas produces less carbon dioxide than coal when burned for electricity generation?. Does he recall that, not so long ago, British Gas limited the amount of gas available by contract pricing so that that premium fuel could be conserved? Does he therefore accept that there is a danger in importing more gas—or, even worse, exporting more—that that valuable chemical may be frittered away in burning rather than being kept as the premium fuel that it truly is?

Mr. Moynihan: On my hon. Friend's first point, it is important to encourage competition in generation. Both the entry and prospect of independent entrants into the market is important to ensure the maximum downward pressure on generating prices. My hon. Friend's question about the environmental impact of gas and the greater use of gas-fired generation is important. The combined cycle gas turbine is a major step forward for the environment. The technology used by the industry is important not merely in terms of high thermal efficiencies but because there are important environmental advantages—the turbines emit no sulphur, have lower emissions of NOx and CO_2 than coal-fired power stations and their introduction at the expense of old and inefficient plant will result in greater energy efficiency. It is important for the House to bear in mind the environmental impact of using gas for electricity generation, as well as the energy efficiency which I mentioned.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does the Minister accept that we welcome the liberalisation of the gas market? We think that there should be rapid progress towards a European gas grid, and that we should allow access across frontiers, without hindrance, as soon as possible, including building the interconnector. I hope that he recognises the dangers. First, we must ensure that more access to gas does not mean more use of it, and we should therefore ensure that energy efficiency and conservation are Government priorities. Secondly, the new structure should be honestly and truly competitive and the protected position of British Gas should be broken up into a real competitive market and not defended. Thirdly, we should have a strategy for energy—of which this is a part—and no behind-the-door deals. With those assurances, we will be supportive.

Mr. Moynihan: I agree with all three points—and we need to break up monopolies on the continent as well.

Sir John Hannam (Exeter): In the wake of the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy about setting up a new United Kingdom joint venture gas marketing company, will my hon. Friend confirm that, initially, that company will concentrate on bringing gas from the United Kingdom continental shelf to our home market?

Mr. Moynihan: That is correct.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that today's announcement about the import of gas is bound to cause confusion as the country knows that we are more than self-sufficient in indigenous sources of energy? Does he agree that, as gas prices will increase by about 50 per cent. in the next five or six years, the deal is not a good one for consumers? The country knows that we import 20 million or 30 million tonnes of coal and we are making miners redundant. Gas-fired power stations will result in electricity employees in power stations being made redundant. Therefore, this is not good news. Is it not time that the Government thought out an energy strategy?

Mr. Moynihan: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), I agree that an energy strategy is important. That is what we are proposing. What I have mentioned today is part and parcel of that strategy. The liberalisation programme of the European Commission, which we fully support, and the increased competition will benefit consumers in United Kingdom markets. The coal industry is well aware of the competition that it faces for a share of the electricity markets. That is why British Coal has made significant strides towards reducing costs and more than doubled productivity since the 1984-85 National Union of Mineworkers' strike.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Will my hon. Friend remind the Opposition that the first Government to import gas—liquefied petroleum gas propane, which was kept in Britain at the largest refrigerated storage in Europe—was the Labour Government in 1968? They encouraged those imports to take the place of coal, which resulted in miners within the Eastern gas board producing less. I am more

[Sir Peter Emery]

interested in the importation of gas than its exportation in order that we may retain our reserves in the North sea and in Britain generally.

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the role of the Labour party in the past. That point was reinforced in relation to importation when the Frigg treaty was negotiated. When talking about proposed imports this afternoon, we are not talking about a new pipeline, but we are aware that we shall need to renegotiate the treaty and possibly amend it. I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today written to the Norwegian Petroleum and Energy Minister stating the Government's readiness to facilitate the imports and undertake negotiations. I believe that that will be done in a spirit of close co-operation with the Norwegian Government.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Minister confirm that any export pipeline will qualify for relief against petroleum revenue tax in the same way as the central area transmission system that takes gas from Aberdeen to Teesside to generate cheap electricity? Will the Minister confirm that more than £100 million in tax relief is involved in the CATS scheme? Can he think of any other country in Europe, bar Scotland, that is paying international oil companies to take away its most valuable natural resource?

Mr. Moynihan: I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman's first point in writing so that I may answer it in detail. He asked about the fiscal regime as it applies to exports. There are details on that within the Finance Bill. The petroleum revenue tax is important, as is the gas levy. The gas levy is paid by British Gas in respect of fields contracted to it before 1975, which are not liable to petroleum revenue tax, and so will not affect the proposed export. As I said, I shall reply to the hon. Gentleman's specific points later.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): While welcoming the Government's proposals, may I ask the Minister whether they will lead to the unlocking of many untapped gas wells in the North sea, both on our side and on the Norwegian side? Will there be a reduction in the high price of industrial gas in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Moynihan: Increased competition will have a beneficial effect on the pricing of gas for the United Kingdom industrial sector. There is no doubt that a liberalisation of the marketplace, with a larger market-place, will be considered attractive by those making long-term investment decisions in the gas sector, particularly in the southern basin. Access to an interconnector with Europe will play an important part in future marketing strategies, so the thrust of my hon. Friend's remarks is correct.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): Has the Minister conducted an exercise into the proposals using the principles of least cost planning? Rather than build pipelines to Norway and construct power stations that burn gas inefficiently, wasting half the energy value of gas, would it not be wiser to invest that money in energy-efficient ways such as insulating houses and replacing old domestic boilers with new and efficient condensing boilers?

Mr. Moynihan: There is no intention of building new pipelines to Norway.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is the Minister aware that there are several coal-fired power stations in my constituency and that the cost of using domestic coal adds about £1 per week on average to every domestic bill for electricity in this country, according to House of Commons Library figures, compared with the cost of using coal at world prices? Has he any idea how much more money all of my constituents will save on their electricity bills when we begin the major switch from coal to gas?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend will be aware that the new contracts for coal will be at competitive prices. I believe that the coal industry is well positioned to negotiate effectively and on merit as a result of the substantial improvements in productivity that have occurred. Coal will continue to have an important share in the British power sector for many years to come, but it will do so on merit.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What is the justification for using scarce chemical feedstock in power stations?

Mr. Moynihan: The hon. Gentleman will know that there are plentiful supplies of gas for the United Kingdom —*[Interruption.]* We are finding more per annum than we are using. In the context of Norway, Algeria and the Soviet Union, there are ample supplies which will make an important contribution to power generation for many decades to come. There is no doubt that, when assessing it in competition with other fuel sources, the environmental benefits must be given serious consideration, and we have obviously done that.

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): Does the Minister accept that large energy users who have been handicapped by a monopoly supplier for far too long will welcome his important anouncement? Will he further accept that, if we do not liberalise the market and connect to the European grid, our competitor countries in Europe will, before long, benefit from substantially increased quantities of cheaper Russian gas to which we shall not have access?

Mr. Moynihan: I totally agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Is the Minister aware that while those countries with which he has been dealing and to which he has referred may be willing to trade with Britain, they will wonder how the Government could have engaged in massive additional import costs, having already created an almost obscene level of trade deficit over the last decade? Does he not appreciate that while Ministers repeatedly profess their concern and interest in the coal industry, his announcement will be seen as yet another blow to our coalfield areas and another cause of loss of jobs, with disastrous effects on communities who deserve more consideration than they have been shown by the Conservatives?

Mr. Moynihan: I totally disagree with what the hon. Gentleman says about the effect of coal. How can he talk about massive additional import costs when we are talking about two contracts which together represent well under 50 per cent. of what the last Labour Government negotiated in terms of imports? Indeed, at that time that Government did not even address the export opportunities

which, in terms of trade, could be far more significant in the long run. It is rich for the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends not to face up to the facts of the matter, which I have described to the House.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): While accepting that we should not have artificial restraints on any fuel and should not artificially support one fuel as against another, will the Minister bear in mind, following the question from the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), that our coal industry is trading in the markets and that we should be careful before we give additional support to a fuel which will come in and compete with a fuel that we already have?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend would be the first to accept that the future size of the coal industry will depend on the amount of business that it manages to secure with the generators. That in turn will depend on the industry's ability to reduce unit costs and improve productivity. British Coal has already made considerable progress in productivity, which is more than double pre-strike levels. It is committed to securing further substantial improvement. That is the best way forward for coal.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): Will the Minister confirm that, when he talks about the export pipeline, he is talking about a study? Many studies have been undertaken in the past; no pipeline has been connected to the European mainland before, because it would have been uneconomic. The Minister has simply attempted some window dressing to make today's announcement about imports appear more acceptable. It is much more likely that no such pipeline will ever be built.

What consideration has the Minister given to the position of our indigenous gas producers? What has he to say to the many thousands who work in the gas industry in such places as Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth, the north-west and Aberdeen, who will be thinking about the implications of today's announcement for coal industry jobs, and wondering what will happen to their own jobs now that the Government have opened the door to massive imports?

What has the Minister to say about the position of the 80 million gas consumers in this country? Today's decision will invitably lead to much higher gas prices.

Mr. Moynihan: I entirely reject the hon. Gentleman's view about the prospect for prices. Consumers will undoubtedly benefit from the liberalisation of the United Kingdom and European markets: they will warmly welcome the export opportunities, and, if the outlet comes to fruition—which I certainly hope will happen—it will doubtless have a significant impact on future investment and jobs in the oil and gas sector.

Companies came to us because they saw the commercial opportunities. Six companies expressed interest to the Department, and were keen to get the study under way. There will be opportunities for other companies to join in the study later. *[Interruption.]* The companies are concerned first and foremost with the feasibility study, not—as the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras suggests from a sedentary position—for the sake of imports, but for the sake of export opportunities in a liberalised market.

Business of the House

3.57 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Motions on the Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order and the African Development Fund (Sixth Replenishment) Order.

TUESDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Motions on the English revenue support grant reports. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

There will be a debate on motions to approve the supplementary estimate 1991-92 relating to the budget of the European Communities, Class XX vote 1, (House of Commons Paper 182) and the estimates 1992-93 (vote on account) (House of Commons Paper 183).

WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill.

Proceedings on the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill.

Motions on the Welsh revenue support grant reports: details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 6 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (4th allotted day).

There will be a debate described as "Government responsibility for the continuing recession in British industries" on an Opposition motion.

FRIDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]*.

Remaining stages of the Transport and Works Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committees will meet on Wednesday 5 February at 10.30 am to consider European Community documents as follows: Committee A, document No. 9997/91, relating to Common Market organisation and milk products; Committee B, document No. 6748/91, relating to tobacco products.

[Tuesday 4 February
English revenue support grant reports
1. Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93
2. Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England)
3. The Population Report (England) (No. 3)
4. The Special Grant Report (No. 3)
Wednesday 5 February
Welsh revenue support grant reports
1. Welsh Revenue Support Grant Report 1992-93 (HC 151)
2. Welsh Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (No. 3) (HC 152)
3. Distribution of Non-Domestic Rates (Relevant Population) Report for Wales (No. 3) (HC 153)
Wednesday 5 February
European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community document
9997/91 Whole Milk Marketing
Relevant Report of the European Legislation Committee
HC 24-vii (1991-92)

[Mr. John MacGregor]

European Standing Committee B
Relevant European Community document
6748/91 Advertising Tobacco Products
Relevant Reports of the European Legislation Committee HC 29-xxix (1990-91), HC 24-i (1991-92) and HC 24-iv (1991-92)]

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Leader of the House accept that, in spite of his panic about business last night and his subsequent changes, he has made an important decision in saving the Opposition's Supply day for next Thursday? Will he assure us that the Government will not erode that Opposition time by allowing statements before it, as has happened on previous Supply days? Is it not important to preserve that time so that the House may have the opportunity to debate the Government's policies on industry over the past 13 years, which have, to quote the Confederation of British Industry report, led not only to no recovery in the second half of 1991 but to continuing falls in employment, investment and output? It is important, in the approach to the general election, that, even if the Government will not provide time to debate their record, the Opposition have the opportunity to do so.

I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the comments in *The Times* today about the Government's feeble proposals for the future government of London and about the mean and spiteful decision taken, admittedly under a previous Prime Minister, to abolish the Greater London council. Is there not now a wide consensus for the re-establishment of an elected authority for London? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Given what *The Times* has said, should not we have an opportunity, in Government time, to debate the future of London, its government and economy?

Mr. MacGregor: There was no panic reaction last night; there was a considered and ordered response to the situation that we faced, and I hope to say something more about that in a moment.

I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman said about the Opposition Supply day next Thursday. I am responsive to the need to find time for Supply days. One of the reasons why I was so concerned last night at the way things were going was that at one time I thought that we might not have time for a Supply day next week. I understand the hon. Gentleman's position, and I have been happy to meet his wishes on this.

As for a statement, I can only say what I have said before, which is that I cannot predict what matters will arise, but I have noted what he has said.

The hon. Gentleman quoted a CBI report, but I could quote large tracts of CBI reports that make it clear that it believes that the British economy has become much more competitive, that manufacturing industry has greatly improved in performance, that exports are well up, and that the policies that it wants to continue into the 1990s are those which we have been pursuing rather than those of the Labour party. However, I shall not pursue that, because I am anxious to move on rapidly to the next debate to allow the maximum time for it. I hope that the debate on the guillotine motion will be short, so that we can get on to the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman will have sensed from the reaction to his comments on the government of London that he is far from right when he says that there is a consensus about the abolition of the GLC. That move was widely welcomed. We would welcome a debate on London, but, in view of the pressures on the timetable, I do not think that it is likely to be in the near future.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me make a special plea to the House. Will hon. Members keep away from electioneering matters and deal with the business for next week? As I understand it, what happened last night was the result of lack of time, and if the guillotine motion is passed, the debate tonight will be concluded at 10 o'clock. Therefore, I hope that hon. Members will ask questions about the business for next week.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): My right hon. Friend will know that we spend a large amount of time discussing coal in our debates on energy issues. May we have an early debate on other forms of energy, particularly oil, gas and nuclear power? My right hon. Friend will know that my constituency has the largest onshore field producing those products. Can we debate the implications of the statement made earlier today for the export by rail of gas from my constituency, and whether that can be traded on the European market?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand my hon. Friend's interest, but it is unlikely that I shall be able to find Government time to discuss that issue in the near future. However, he might be able to find time himself to do so.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Having made up my mind about the difference between May day and St. Andrew's day, may I ask the Leader of the House to confirm that agreement has been reached about the meetings of the subject days for the Scottish Grand Committee? Is it the case that there will be one full day in Edinburgh and two half days in London? Against the background of constitutional trauma and clamour for change in Scotland, does it not seem ridiculous that not all the Scottish Grand Committee meetings are to be held in Scotland so that people can, rightly, hear what we all have to say?

Mr. MacGregor: I can confirm that agreement has been reached on the discussions to take place in the Scottish Grand Committee. I am pleased about that, because it is important that the issues are fully debated. So much of the debate has until now been somewhat unrealistic, and I am anxious to ensure that the issues are properly debated on a realistic basis within the Scottish Grand Committee.

I confirm that one day will be spent in Edinburgh, as I understand it, and two half days here. I am sure that the hon. Lady will agree that the fact that some issues are debated here does not mean that they are not heavily reported in Scotland. There has been an endeavour to reach an agreement which, I hope, will be acceptable to all involved. The important point is that the debates will take place.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Is not the way round the problem which was drawn to the attention of the Leader of the House by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) to persuade the Opposition to change next Thursday's debate to a debate on the private notice question that they tabled today? They would then have the opportunity to hear about the success of

National Power and PowerGen in my constituency, which are efficiently building two combined cycle gas turbine power stations to ensure that there is no damage to the environment and that the customer gets cheap electricity.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I hope that if he and my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) catch your eye, Mr Speaker, they will raise that issue and elaborate on it during the debate next Thursday.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): Will the Leader of the House consider setting a time for the House to discuss the crises of student grants and student accommodation, especially as they affect polytechnics, such as the polytechnic of Wales, which are now seeking university status and where continual funding crises often mean that student accommodation is being dumped on the local authority as a perennial problem?

Mr. MacGregor: Clearly it would be wrong for me to go into that issue now. I cannot promise a general debate on that subject, but it might be relevant when the Further and Higher Education Bill reaches the Floor of the House. I shall reflect on that, but that seems to be the nearest opportunity.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Can my right hon. Friend say when he will make time for the Friendly Societies Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: That was certainly in my mind when I was considering the issue that faced the House last night, because, as I shall elaborate in a moment during the debate on the timetable motion, I take many issues into account when working out the House's business. As I have told the many hon. Members and hon. Friends who have written to me about it, we are making good progress on the drafting of the Bill and I certainly hope to be able to introduce it this Session, but it depends on the other pressures on the timetable.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Is the Leader of the House aware that in Scotland—in Faslane and Coulport—men in a private security company are breaking every rule in the book? Will he arrange for the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement about my constituents and others who have been asked to work more than 10 hours, 20 hours, 30 hours or 40 hours in a row to guard national security and being paid £1·85 an hour for that terrible task? I ask for the Secretary of State to make an urgent statement, because many of our constituents are concerned.

Mr. MacGregor: I doubt whether it will be possible for a statement to be made on that issue next week. The hon. Gentleman has already heard that I am under pressure to ensure that there are no statements on certain days, but I shall draw his point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): As the Opposition are clearly running scared on health, will my right hon. Friend find Government time to stage a debate on health care? Is he aware that in Cannock, where Mrs. Nye Bevan, otherwise known as Jennie Lee, was the Member of Parliament for 25 years, doctors are delighted at the way in which our reforms are working out? Such a debate would enable me to draw to the attention of the House the fact that in Cannock we have a brand new £22 million NHS hospital which had been promised for 50 years but which was delivered by a Tory Government.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes several good points. I would like to be able to find time for a debate to enable him and my other hon. Friends to elaborate those points. I agree that there is no doubt about the increasing support in the medical profession for our reforms, and the growing recognition of the big increases in capital spending that we have undertaken. I hope that my hon. Friend will find time on many other occasions, not just in such debates, to make those points.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have an early debate on the horrendous and continuing rise in unemployment in the east midlands in general, and in the city of Leicester in particular? Is the Leader of the House aware that, during 1991, unemployment in my constituency rose by 39 per cent., and that it is continuing to rise? Should not that terrible hardship inflicted so unnecessarily on so many people be discussed in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry that the hon. and learned Gentleman has not noticed that we have debated employment issues a great deal in the past few weeks and months—[HON. MEMBERS: "Unemployment."] We have debated employment and unemployment. It has been said several times that we have one of the highest rates of employment in the European Community, and that Labour policies would greatly exacerbate unemployment. The issue has already often been raised in the House.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 585?

[That this House is increasingly aware of how it was misled, and indeed used, as part of a finely calculated and deliberate injustice perpetrated for party political reasons against the honourable Member for Winchester and his constituents on 7th March 1990, by senior Government Ministers and of the abuse of the whipping system on that day to influence the vote of the House whilst sitting in judgment over one of its honourable Members; notes that of the Government Ministers directly involved, namely the Right honourable Members for Surrey East, Mole Valley and Mid Sussex one was a Queen's Counsel and a past Foreign Secretary in charge of MI6 and another, as Home Secretary, is now in charge of MI5; is deeply concerned that if such Ministers, deemed fit to control the secret services of the Crown, can take such blatantly discriminatory and unjust action against a loyal colleague, then no citizen of this land is safe under the law; believes that continued delay by Her Majesty's Government in the face of this obvious case will be seen by the general public either as a cover up or as condoning the gross misconduct of the senior Ministers involved; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to act swiftly, before the election, either to bring this matter urgently before the Committee of Privileges or to allow the honourable Member for Winchester to present his case before Parliament in Government time before further injustice is done in this or any future case.]

I also draw to his attention early-day motions 115, 121 —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Only one early-day motion may be drawn attention to.

Mr. Browne: It is clear that a great and quite deliberate injustice was perpetrated by abusing the privileges and procedures of the House. I first gave notice of that injustice almost a year ago. If the Government, knowing of the case, and of that involving the late Lord Boothby, feel that the people involved are innocent, why does my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House continue to resist the idea of bringing a motion before the House so that the matter could be explained, rather than running the risk that every right hon. and hon. Member remains exposed to the same injustice? Will my right hon. Friend allow a debate on the subject, as a matter of urgency?

Mr. MacGregor: No, because the matter was fully debated on a previous occasion. I have nothing to add at present.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the right hon. Gentleman consider asking the Minister responsible for industry in Scotland to make a statement next week about the way in which regional development arrangements disadvantage areas such as mine, which have no assisted area status? Is he aware that a proposed Sweater Shop factory which would have created 200 new jobs was diverted from Hawick to the west coast of Scotland simply because of the availability of regional assistance, which is not available in south-east Scotland? The situation is serious, and it is about time that the Government made a statement and reviewed the situation as a matter of urgency.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that a statement would be appropriate. I recall, when I was at the Department of Trade and Industry examining the issue, that areas without development area status were worried about the shift of jobs to areas with such status. That is one of the reasons why we rationalised development area status.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth)? Every reasonable person understands that our reforms are having a beneficial effect on the national health service. Such a debate would give us a chance to consider the statement by Nye Bevan's nephew that the NHS would not be safe in the Labour party's hands.

Mr. MacGregor: Many people have noticed that statement, which comes from someone with considerable practical working experience of the health service, who understands the relevance of the reforms. I have noticed the understandable desire of many of my hon. Friends to debate the health service so that we can explain more of the benefits of our period in office. I shall bear my hon. Friend's request in mind.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Social Security to make a statement next week about cold weather payments? Is he aware that in Bradford, for instance, some pensioners receive the £6 that is made available while others do not? Even people living in the same street are being treated differently, with those on one side of the street receiving the payment and those on the other side being denied it. Will he investigate urgently that great injustice and grievance, and ensure that proper arrangements are made so that everyone who is eligible receives the payment promptly?

Mr. MacGregor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge the fact that we introduced the cold weather payments system and that, in the light of experience, we have improved them considerably. As a result, because of the temperatures in the eligible areas, groups such as the elderly and disabled who receive income support have received automatically a payment of £6. So far this year, that has resulted in the expenditure of approximately £19 million, so the system is clearly operating. If the hon. Gentleman has difficulties in relation to particular constituents, I suggest that he writes in the normal way to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Keith Raffan (Delyn): In view of the fact that the Scottish Grand Committee is to debate the constitutional question and the implications of devolution, will my right hon. Friend assure the House that the Welsh Grand Committee will be given a similar opportunity to discuss those matters as they relate to Wales?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot assure my hon. Friend that those matters can be debated in the same way as they are being debated in the Scottish Grand Committee. If he wishes to raise particular points, I am sure that he will find opportunities to do so.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Leader of the House please find time next week to debate the question of RECHAR? We have had a series of unsatisfactory ministerial statements on RECHAR and it is clear that the Government are cheating some areas of money that is rightly theirs. It is important that the matter be brought before the House so that we can examine it closely and scrupulously.

Mr. MacGregor: I disagree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman's charge. The responsibility now lies with the Commissioner.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on the impersonation of Conservative Members to the press for political purposes? Does he agree that it is a most serious matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that I shall need further notice of my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): The Leader of the House will have noticed early-day motion 51 asking for a posthumous pardon for Derek Bentley. It has been signed by 191 hon. Members of all parties throughout the United Kingdom.

[That this House welcomes the book To Encourage the Others by David A. Yallop, calling for an independent public inquiry into the hanging of Derek Bentley in 1952; requests the Home Secretary to set up the inquiry as a matter of urgency; hopes that such a request will lead to a posthumous pardon; and feels that this will end a grave miscarriage of justice which leaves a permanent blot on the British judicial system—the hanging of an innocent man.]

Will the Leader of the House ask the Home Secretary to speed up the police inquiry so that we can debate the matter in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall look into the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will welcome the opportunity to debate Scotland's

constitution in the Scottish Grand Committee. I am sure that he realises that constitutional matters are clearly important to the House, the Union and the unitary Parliament. As there has been a decline in the support for an assembly with legislative and tax-raising powers in Scotland and a rise in demands for independence, is it not about time that the House debated fully what socialist nationalism really means?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I notice that the polls to which reference has been made have shown declining support for an assembly with tax-raising powers. A poll in an Aberdeen newspaper today shows that that support has fallen even further. I suspect that that is a result of the fact that a spotlight has now been put on some of the implications of that proposal, which is why I am keen to have a wider debate on other aspects of the question. I also recognise that, because of the major constitutional matters involved, not only Scottish but many English Members of Parliament would wish to participate in that debate. I shall bear in mind my hon. Friend's request, but, for the moment, the right step is the one that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has taken.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The Leader of the House has mentioned a debate next Wednesday in European Standing Committee B on tobacco products. Will he confirm that this is a proposal to ban tobacco advertising and sponsorship? Will he tell the House when the Government are likely to table the motion for that debate? Is he aware that the Select Committee on European Legislation has issued a number of reports on this matter, the latest of which is published today, contains the summarised views of 40 organisations concerned and will be available in the Vote Office at once as a separate document?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman has said about the document now available. I cannot immediately confirm to him when the motion will be tabled, but, as he knows, we always endeavour to get that done as quickly as possible.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): My right hon. Friend has said that next week a European Standing Committee will consider milk and milk products. Will he find another opportunity for the House to debate agriculture and farm incomes, bearing in mind the continuing uncertainty of the GATT negotiations and EC reform proposals? Is this not a matter of widespread concern in which positive Government policies contrast sharply with the absence of any worthwhile strategy among the parties on the Opposition Benches?

Mr. MacGregor: We had a debate before Christmas on these matters. As a former Minister of Agriculture, I am keen to have them debated as often as possible. I agree with my hon. Friend that one of the difficulties is still the uncertainty surrounding the GATT negotiations, and we hope that they will succeed very soon. That may be an appropriate time to have either a further statement or a debate in the House, when some of the points that my hon. Friend has made can be brought out.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Is the Leader of the House aware of the grave concern that is being expressed about the British merchant fleet, a concern that is even expressed in the professional papers, particularly about bulk carriers, many of which have been described as rust buckets sailing the ocean or as disasters waiting to happen? Will he ask the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement to the House on these matters so that the British merchant fleet can be debated here?

Mr. MacGregor: I very much doubt that a statement is appropriate next week, but I will draw the point to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am aware of the pressure on time, but can my right hon. Friend find time next week to debate the affairs of the Royal Life Insurance company, one of whose agents, a Mr. Kissane, has swindled about 500 people out of several thousand pounds each? Does he agree that a debate might bring pressure to bear on all concerned to come to a settlement as soon as possible and restore their life savings to a number of people?

Mr. MacGregor: I am concerned to hear what my hon. Friend says. Without knowing the details, I cannot comment on whether a debate would accelerate a solution of the problems. I cannot give Government time for a debate, but my hon. Friend might consider whether the opportunities available to him should be used to deal with the point that he has raised.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): Next week the Government must give their response to a finding by the European Community, after a three-year investigation, that dumping of cotton and polyester yarn has been proved against Turkey, Brazil and Egypt. During the three years that this has taken to consider, 31 spinning mills have closed, with a loss of 4,000 to 5,000 jobs. Naturally, those who are employed in the industry and the employers are very anxious that we give a prompt and positive response to the proposals to stop the dumping, but when I telephoned the Minister's office this morning I was told that no response had so far been prepared. Will the Leader of the House ensure that this is treated as a matter of urgency because of the number of people whose jobs are involved?

Mr. MacGregor: I will discuss the point with my right hon. Friend.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): May we have a statement next week from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs so that hon. Members can tell him how pleased we are at his announcement today that from now on all electricial appliances must have moulded-on plugs? This will be widely welcomed, particularly by the disabled and the elderly, and the House should have a chance to give him the congratulations that are his due.

Mr. MacGregor: I know of my hon. Friend's involvement in this matter, and I am sure that a great deal of credit is due to him. I hope that we shall all do what he advises to make sure that the Government's position is widely known.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Leader of the House address the appalling plight of 62 non-haemophiliac patients, one of whom is a constituent of mine, who have contracted the HIV virus as a consequence of treatment in the national health service?

[Mr. John Home Robertson]

There seems to be appalling discrimination in that this small group of people do not receive any compensation while others do. May we have an urgent statement from Ministers before more of these tragically unfortunate people lose their lives?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the issue and sympathise with the plight of those who have been infected with HIV as a result of blood transfusions. I think that the matter has been debated in the House and considered. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the House decided not to support the principle of no-fault compensation for medical accidents. If the NHS is proved negligent in a court, it accepts its liability to pay damages.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I fear that it will not be possible to call all those hon. Members who wish to ask questions, because we must move to the guillotine motion by 4.30. I ask for brief questions, and I shall call as many hon. Members as I can in the remaining five minutes.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Did my right hon. Friend see the front pages of *The Star* and *The Sun* yesterday which expressed concern about the misuse of ecstasy in the north-west, and especially on Merseyside, where seven young people have died and where a drug centre is using Merseyside regional health authority funds to distribute a leaflet encouraging young people to take ecstasy, a class A drug? May we have time next week to debate this matter and express our concern?

Mr. MacGregor: I share my hon. Friend's concern. We should all be grateful to those two newspapers for highlighting the issue. I do not know whether we can have a debate on the matter, but I hope that it has now been clearly drawn to the attention of the public.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): May I again ask the Leader of the House to ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to make a statement next week on the proposed bridge to the Isle of Skye, the local planning inquiry for which is now under way? Not least among the problems are the difficulties that objectors encounter through not having public funding to enable them to present their views and have proper legal representation. Another difficulty is the absence of a published environmental impact assessment by the Scottish Office. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for the Secretary of State to explain those matters?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure that a statement would be appropriate and, as the House realises, I am under great pressure about next week's business. We have a heavy programme. However, I will again draw the point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): May we have a debate next week on whether the initiation of changes in the law with regard to membership rules for working men's clubs, a highly sensitive issue, should be invested in the unelected, unaccountable Commission for Racial Equality rather than in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that we can have a debate on that matter next week, and my hon. Friend must find other ways to raise it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a debate on regional policy? Would it not be quite improper for Volvo Bus to close a major bus plant in Workington, which has received much taxpayers' money in regional grants, and move to Irvine in Scotland and receive taxpayers' money in the form of regional assistance?

Mr. MacGregor: I recall that there are rules about regional development grants, but I do not know how they apply in this case. It seems to me that the point could be raised by the hon. Gentleman in next Thursday's debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Will the Leader of the House further consider the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) about cold weather payments? In any debate about that matter, we would say that it is most unfortunate that the temperature has to drop to zero or below for seven consecutive days before any payment is made and, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, that such payment is made only to those on income support. It is deplorable that hundreds of thousands or more pensioners, many of them on the lowest possible income, are suffering in this cold weather and are not getting a penny.

Mr. MacGregor: Such schemes were not available during the period of office of the Labour Government. In addition, there have been very substantial improvements in income support and in social security arrangements generally.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Does my right hon. Friend think that it would be relevant, in next Thursday's debate, to raise the success of the policy of contracting out? Perhaps he has noticed that, in the latest redraft of the Labour party's policies on London, there seems to be acceptance of contracting out to private companies and, indeed, to the London boroughs. Surely those are the very things that the Labour party intends to try to replace.

Mr. MacGregor: If my hon. Friend were to catch your eye next Thursday, Mr. Speaker, it would be highly relevant that he should make a contribution on these points.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will my right hon. Friend make time to debate the desirability or otherwise of regional assemblies with tax-raising powers? In the north-west—Stockport in particular—there is concern about how horrendous a regional assembly dominated by left-wing Manchester and militant Liverpool would be.

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. As I pointed out earlier, the discussion of the constitutional position in Scotland—a debate that is about to take place in the Scottish Grand Committee—has much wider implications, involving, in respect of a number of issues, everyone in England and Wales. I hope that in that debate those implications will be made clear. I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that those who are putting forward the idea of regional assemblies are doing so for the purpose of getting themselves out of a hole in their own policies and that there is absolutely no support in England for it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I dislike curtailing business questions, but I have managed to call those who were not called last week, and I shall do likewise next week.

Points of Order

4.30 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that we are not going to have a rash of points of order. If this is a genuine point of order, the hon. Gentleman may make it.

Mr. Dalyell: It is a genuine point of order relating to the drafting of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill, which is to be taken next Wednesday. A problem arises when both Front Benches agree on something but others have doubts. I cannot complain about the Minister of State, Scottish Office, as he has been extremely courteous about the many queries that I have put to him. However, he said that he would take away clause 48, which is the same as section 77 of the Education Act 1944, and ask the parliamentary draftsmen to come up with a solution. Some of us think that this may be mission impossible. The crucial point for you, Mr. Speaker, is when we are going to see this key amendment. The whole attitude to the Bill will depend, first, on the amendment that is produced and, secondly, on whether we shall have time next week to consult vice-chancellors and others as to its acceptability to them. I wonder whether this matter could be raised.

Mr. Speaker: I have not been able to look at the amendments to the Bill, but I shall bear carefully in mind what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): During the questions arising from last Tuesday's statement on trade union reform, the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) bellowed from a sedentary position that I was sponsored by Lloyd's. As, for some reason, this statement was considered sufficiently significant not only to enter the *Hansard* record but also to be broadcast by the BBC in "Yesterday in Parliament", may I take this opportunity to put the record straight? Regrettably, Lloyd's has never considered it worth its while to sponsor me. Indeed, sadly—unaccountably perhaps—no one has ever considered it worth his while to sponsor me. Unlike the hon. Member for Workington, I am not sponsored by a union. As he has such a successful track record in securing sponsorship, perhaps he will put me in touch with any other generous sponsors that he knows of.

Mr. Speaker: I hope the hon. Gentleman will take comfort from the fact that he is sponsored by his constituency.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: As the hon. Gentleman has had a chance to say his piece, perhaps the record should be put straight. I am sponsored, but, as you, Mr. Speaker, will know, I receive from my union no moneys—no personal remuneration, no out-of-pocket expenses. In the Register of Members' Interests, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) declares, under "Trades or Professions", that he is a member of Lloyd's

Mr. Oppenheim: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a sponsorship.

Mr. Oppenheim: I should like to make a point very briefly, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman does not know

[Mr. Oppenheim]

the difference between being a name at Lloyd's, which these days, regrettably, generally costs one money, and being sponsored, which means receiving money, it is not surprising that he is on the Opposition Benches. Presumably the union that sponsors him expects something for the money that it pays.

Mr. Speaker: May I have a point of order that I can answer, please?

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raise this point of order as a genuine friend, not a special friend.

Question No. 4 to the Prime Minister today was a closed question about May day. Normally, following your reasonable practice, you call a Member from one side and then the other. Therefore, there was an opportunity for those of us who are interested in May day to ask a question. Reasonably, you chose to call the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). It quickly became obvious that the hon. Lady had made a mistake, which is easily done and has been done by most of us; she thought that it was an open question. On reflection, would it not have been fairer if you had then called another Opposition Member instead of letting our opportunity go, simply because the hon. Lady had made an understandable mistake? We were all punished because she had not read the Order Paper correctly.

Mr. Speaker: What might have been fair in the hon. Gentleman's view would have been unfair to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), whose question I just managed to reach. It is a question of balance.

Education (Schools) (Allocation of Time)

4.35 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:

Report and Third Reading

1.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

(2) Stand Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Order of proceedings

2. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings on consideration of the Bill are taken.

Dilatory Motions

3. No dilatory Motions with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made on the allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Private business

4. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on the allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

5.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 above and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Question (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) the Question that all remaining amendments standing in the name of a member of the Government be made to the Bill;

(e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If the allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If the allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

6.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the

provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

7. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

8.—(1) Reference in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On the allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

9. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Education (Schools) Bill.

The whole House knows that we have a very full programme, involving both Houses and a great deal of work. Irrespective of when the election comes, the Session is bound to be shorter than usual, with no overspill in the autumn.

I have frequently made clear in business questions the difficult balancing act required in managing this Session's business in the House. Hon. Members on both sides press for additional time to debate subjects of great importance. Many days have to be allocated to requirements enjoined upon us by Standing Orders. The Opposition press, understandably, for their rightful allocation of Supply days. I always have to find time to accommodate additional legislation, and I have been trying to find time to enable us to deal with the Friendly Societies Bill.

Throughout the Session, I have tried to balance the requests with the need to get the Government's business through and to ensure that the House has adequate time to consider all legislation. It is my job as Leader of the House to manage business in the interests of the whole House, while at the same time endeavouring to get the legislation through in an orderly manner.

The Education (Schools) Bill had full discussion in Committee over 15 sittings and 36½ hours. In all previous discussions on this week's business, the Opposition, whether through their education spokesmen or through the usual channels, never asked for more than one day on Report and Third Reading, so we had no hint that there was any difficulty until we were well into the proceedings yesterday, when they made it clear that they had reservations. They did not seem to know what concessions they wanted or what their concern was. That is certainly how it seemed. Therefore, it seemed to me that it was in the interests of the whole House to make the change that I made. It allows two full days to complete Report and Third Reading of the Bill instead of one day. I think that that is a generous response.

The timetable motion provides for ordered debate of the Bill and minimises the impact on other business this week and next. I repeat that we have now given two days to the Report stage and Third Reading of the Bill. It is important to proceed without delay to the real matter of debate, which is the substance of the Bill. I hope that the House will deal briefly with the motion and that the whole House can resume the debate, as I believe it wishes.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I understand that the motion is a simple guillotine motion for a closure of all the remaining new clauses and amendments by 10 o'clock. I am not making any comment on that. Can the Leader of the House give some assurance, both to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), who has tabled amendments, and to me that amendments tabled by Back Benchers who are not spokesmen for their parties on these matters have a chance of being debated, and that there has not been a secret carve-up of the time between now and 10 o'clock which excludes the consideration of all the amendments on the amendment paper?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not aware of any carve-up. I am anxious to move straight on to the Bill so that as many amendments as possible can be considered and debated during the rest of the day. That is why I commend the motion to the House.

4.39 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): There was no need for the Leader of the House ever to have made his business statement last night or to have moved the guillotine motion today. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked about a carve-up. The Leader of the House is responsible for another phrase ending in "up", but it is not "carve-up".

The origins of the dispute lie first and foremost in the fact that the Government have no mandate for the proposals in the legislation. None of the measures in the Bill was in the Conservative party's election manifesto. Secondly, some of the provisions of the Bill are plainly stupid. It is increasingly clear that even the Secretary of State for Education and Science cannot justify what he is doing in respect of the inspectorate.

Important issues are at stake which affect the future standard and quality of our children's education. It is perfectly legitimate for all Opposition parties—I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey—to want to examine those issues in detail. If the Conservative party had any stomach for the debate and any support for their arguments, the debate could have continued last night and could have been concluded by now. We could have continued with the important business of today and next week.

As some Conservative Members—I absolve the Leader of the House at least of this—have charged us with filibustering, let us examine what we were due to consider yesterday. Thirty-one Government amendments, 44 Labour amendments and some amendments from the Liberal Democrats were tabled. During the debate, 13 Labour Members, nine Conservative Members and one Liberal Member spoke. That was because my hon. Friends

[Dr. John Cunningham]

moved several new clauses. During that time, there were 53 Labour interventions and 40 Conservative interventions. The longest speech of all was made by the Secretary of State. So any argument about abuse of the time available falls flat on its face. The Secretary of State spoke for almost 40 minutes at one point. Well might he smile about those bogus charges about the Opposition not wanting to get on with the important matters for debate.

Not only were speeches made from the Government Benches but several speeches made by Conservative Members were important criticisms of the provisions of the Bill. I refer to the interventions made by the hon. Members for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) and for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison). They asked important questions about the implications of the Secretary of State's proposals. The one exception was the patsy type of speech by the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who smiles at me from a sedentary position.

The Bill confuses the roles of the regulators—the inspectors—with that of the providers of the service—the schools and the teachers—by allowing the latter to pick their own watchdog. That is far too cosy a relationship for Opposition Members to accept, and it is contrary to the flow of argument that we have heard from the Government and their supporters for many years in respect of the Office of Telecommunications, the Office of Water Services, the Office of Electricity Regulation or the National Rivers Authority. Those regulators are all separated from the organisations that they are supposed to scrutinise in the public interest.

Yet we are told in respect of our children's education —as I often say, it is our children's education, not that of Conservative Members' children—that a cosy little relationship should be allowed between the schools and their inspectors. It is rather like mice choosing their own cats. It is a Tom and Jerry type of relationship. There will be cosy little get-togethers among people who want to cuddle up to each other. There is no way that anyone can sustain the argument that that is proper independent scrutiny of important aspects of education. So we make no apology for opposing the measure and wanting to deal in detail with the implications for our schools and children.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): My hon. Friend might be going a little far to suggest that the relationship is a corrupting one, but does he agree that in the eyes of parents and perhaps the general public it might be potentially corrupting of otherwise disinterested professionals?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend must choose his own words, but I can certainly see the Bill as a recipe for an ineffectual relationship. That is principally why the head teachers themselves do not want the proposals. They have stated clearly that the proposed relationship is not the type that they want to see develop between head teachers, their schools and the inspectorates. Of course, many parents share that view.

The real reason for the timetable motion is nothing to do with proper scrutiny or debate. The Leader of the House is in a panic because of the Government's hidden election timetable. It is all consistent with a general election on 9 April. I hope that that is the case. Even on yesterday's opinion poll result, the Government will be out of office, and the sooner that happens, the better.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science has been confronted in interviews and debates many times, most recently this morning on breakfast television, about the aspect of his legislation that I have described. He has refused to answer directly how he can possibly justify it. I do not suspect that we shall get any more clarity from him about it today. But we shall try.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): If a school in Lambeth chooses between two inspectors, it chooses between two inspectors who are independent of it and detached from the provider. The Labour alternative is that Lambeth schools should have no choice and should be inspected only by Lambeth council, which runs them. The provider would inspect the provider. The argument used as the basis for the daft filibuster last night does not stand up to a moment's scrutiny.

Dr. Cunningham: Under the Secretary of State's proposals, the inspectors would be paid by the school that they are engaged to inspect. There is a customer-client relationship there. To say that that is a road to independent scrutiny of what is going on in schools is ridiculous. The inspectors will be employed by the school.

As the Secretary of State has unwisely come back to the point about filibustering, I remind him that the longest single speech yesterday was made by him. He is the last one to complain about Labour Members questioning his proposals. In view of what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has just said about the proposal, I refer him to what the hon. Member for Buckingham said yesterday on that very issue:

"If a school is inspected by this or that type of inspector and receives full marks for its work but does not merit those marks, that will become clear over time and as a result of trial and error."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 964.]

What the right hon. Gentleman is proposing yet again is more experiments with our children's education; more hitty-missy approaches to the Government's policy dogmas. That is what his hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham believes, and that is what we believe, too.

We intend to put the most searching spotlight on this further ridiculous and unnecessary experimenting with our children's education standards and with their schools, because this is a matter of great interest to the people of this country, and rightly so.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The accusation that we were filibustering yesterday is hardly borne out by what happened on the Government Benches. At one stage, the lack of enthusiasm for this Bill was evidenced on the Tory Back Benches. There was only a part of the Tory Front-Bench team in the Chamber; there was not a single Back Bencher to continue the debate. Hon. Gentlemen went out frantically to drag Back Benchers in from the corridors. They know that what I am saying is absolutely true.

Mr. Cunningham: I agree with my hon. Friend. The reality is that hon. Gentlemen will be in the Lobbies tonight when the votes come, but they demonstrate by their absence now their lack of commitment to the state education system.

The Government have broken the back of the British economy, as evidenced yet again by the Confederation of British Industry report, the Engineering Employers Federation, the building employers and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. What the Government are about here again is another dogmatic experiment with education in our schools. This legislation ought to be stopped. We will do our best to prevent its getting on the statute book. That is what these debates are all about.

4.55 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): I regret that we have to have a guillotine on this important matter. I and, I think, many of my hon. Friends on the Back Benches, prefer it when the Front Benches can reach a voluntary agreement as to how much time we should spend on any particular Bill. However, being faced with a guillotine very much concentrates minds and gives Ministers the chance to reply very specifically to questions from both inside and outside the Chamber.

I did not think that yesterday's debate wandered very much, but it did give rise to one very interesting matter in relation to the inspection of schools, which affects Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. My right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Sir. T. Raison) said:

"the county of Buckinghamshire . . . has produced the highest level of GCE passes of any of the shire counties in England and the second highest of any of the English local authorities."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 976.]

One of the reasons why Buckinghamshire children have done so well is that so many of them cross over into my constituency in Bedfordshire to take the GCE in two Leighton Buzzard upper schools—Van Dyke and Cedars—both extremely good schools. I congratulate the Government on loosening the rigidity between the local education authorities, which allows young people in Buckinghamshire to cross over and makes Buckinghamshire parents very happy. When the Government are re-elected I hope that, as education develops, they will be able to make it more precise and obvious that the money really follows the pupil.

I know that Buckinghamshire young people will continue to cross the border into Leighton Buzzard for their GCE, so obviously we want to see in Bedfordshire more evidence of the money following the pupil. That is for the next Conservative Government and the next Education Secretary. I merely mention it in passing because a little wandering in the debate did bring in a very important Buckinghamshire-Bedfordshire point.

As I have said, the guillotine concentrates the mind. The moton says:

"The proceedings on consideration and Third reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock."

One of the reasons why I am glad that we are to get this matter dealt with today is that there appears to be an unclear position with regard to inspection of schools. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, who I am very glad to see in his place, wrote to Dr. R. Morris of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities earlier this month and said in one part of his letter, referring to the local education authorities:

"They will also be able to go into schools in connection with carrying out their broad statutory duties for the provision of education."

That raises a very interesting point, because parents and friends of schools would like to see the LEAs going in to look at deterioration of the buildings; failure to deliver the national curriculum; very poor examination results; the conduct of a particular teacher; the conduct of the governors and the head; alleged financial mismanagement; failure to provide school leavers with guidance and help towards their future careers or towards getting places in a university or a polytechnic; and failure to investigate parental complaints.

Those are specific points. They are all matters which, in my view, are part of a local education authority's broad statutory duty for the provision of education. I understand that if any or all of those points were raised by a parent or a friend of the school, the education authority would be able to go into the school.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I am listening to the hon. Gentleman with very great care. Is he aware that the Association of County Councils, on which his own county council and Buckinghamshire and many other Conservative county councils are represented—indeed, the association is controlled by the Conservatives—says that the removal of the power to inspect under section 77(3) of the Education Act 1944 will greatly diminish the local authority's ability to intervene in a school that is falling below standard?

Mr. Madel: I am in very close touch with Bedfordshire county council, and the hon. Gentleman is right; it is concerned about this, too. I think that what I will conclude by saying will answer the hon. Gentleman's point.

I do not think that the House of Commons wants to get into an argument about when an inspection is not an inspection. One could play around with the word ad nauseam; then, the next thing that we would be arguing about is the place of the potato in English folklore. We want something very specific, which is why I welcome this specific day for the Bill.

If any of those specific points that I have listed came up, I believe, on the basis of what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said in his letter, that the local education authority could go into the school. It would be carrying out its broad statutory duty for the provision of education. Every one of those specific points refers to the provision of education. I hope that, before 10 o'clock, my hon. Friends on the Front Bench will be able to assure me specifically that what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said in his letter to Dr. Morris would allow local education authorities, if approached by parents or friends of the school, to go into the school to deal with any one of the specific points that I have raised.

4.59 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I rarely speak or am active on guillotine motions and resulting business arrangements on timing, because in general I have long been in favour of timetabling all Bills from the start. My experience over many years is that Standing Committees and other similar Committees on the Floor of the House, with exceptions that I will come to in a moment, never give Bills the due consideration that they ought to have. One of the reasons why I was in favour of televising the House and Committees was that I thought

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that it might be a good idea for the public to see Standing Committees, with Ministers doing their mail and others trying to hold up the business.

With regard to the Bill before us today, education is a most important issue and I doubt whether the House, despite the intentions of the few who are actively interested, has looked at the problems that have arisen.

So in general I am in favour of timetabling from the start. I understand the dangers. I understand the problems in hung Parliaments, and all the rest of it. I had the dubious pleasure, after Second Reading, of trying to pilot the House of Lords reform Bill through the House many years ago, when we found that the divisions were on both sides of the House and any idea that one could timetable or guillotine soon went out of the window.

For the reasons that I have given, I am sceptical of the existing system and therefore I rarely speak on such motions. Yesterday afternoon and evening, I sat in the Chamber because I am interested in the subject of the inspectorate. I owe a great deal to my education many years ago, as I come from the background of a Welsh mining village, where a high proportion of us ended up with university degrees—a far higher rate than in many posher, salubrious, suburban areas. I am even more interested these days, not because of my children who are grown up, but because I am interested in special education. All Governments have failed to deal properly with that, despite all their Ministers' words. I question whether the inspectorate is giving it due consideration.

I listened carefully to the debate on the inspectorate yesterday. As the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) will know, last century the inspectorate played an important part in developing Welsh education, not necessarily by visiting each school to give its view, although no doubt that played a part but by creating a philosophy—in the Matthew Arnold sense of the term—for the development of education which, frankly, one does not get from party manifestos. When I read that junior Ministers are interfering with the curriculum, I get worried, because I do not think that they know very much about it. There are times when I think that other people know little about it, but politicians are the last people to pontificate about the curriculum, and I hope that teachers and inspectors are concerned about it.

I sat in on the debate yesterday because of my great interest in the role of the inspectorate and in what will happen if schools and local education authorities, however affluent, pay little attention to special needs. What good can a tied inspectorate do?

I saw no example of filibuster yesterday afternoon and evening. As my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunninghan) said, the Secretary of State spoke for a long time—until about 6 o'clock. If there was any urgency in getting the Bill through, the Secretary of State did not show it. There were many interventions. The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who has a great interest in education, spoke for a long time, as did other hon. Members on both sides of the House. There was something odd about the whole procedure because there was no great urgency. I began to realise that something was very wrong.

The guillotine was not decided at 9.55 pm last night, when the first frisson went through the Government Front Bench and Ministers began to pass around bits of paper and to consult properly, but earlier.

The only reason that I am speaking is that I do not believe that the guillotine motion has anything to do with speeding up the Education (Schools) Bill because time was being wasted. It is being used simply to speed things up for the general election.

If polling day is 9 April, a certain amount of time is needed to get business through the House, and that is all that the guillotine is for. That is what happened last night. Possibly, the delay in the English and Welsh revenue grants is to enable the Government to deal with the problem of poll tax bills which will be plopping through doors shortly.

I am opposed to what is happening and shall readily vote tonight. It is not because I am not interested in timetabling—although it is too late now, as I shall be leaving the House shortly. I hope that one day there will be pre-timetabling in the House, except for important and constitutional Bills. However, this motion is to do with the election. I must tell the Leader of the House that, if the election is to be on 9 April—everyone is planning for it, buying space to advertise and organising; one hears it from sources in the advertising business who know what the Opposition and the Government are doing—then, for the good of the House, for heaven's sake announce the date and let us do business in a sensible fashion during the next six weeks, instead of proceeding in this way and covering up the reality.

We are in an election period and the guillotine motion is for election purposes. It has nothing to do with the inspectorate. What the Government are doing about the inspectorate is extremely foolish and flies in the face of its proud history.

5.4 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): If ever there was a case for the timetabling of Bills, it is the shenanigans over this Bill.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): Nonsense.

Mr. Nelson: I believe that that is the case, and the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) was right to call for the timetabling of Bills. I notice that a great many people were nodding when he suggested that, possibly including the hon. Lady, who should not be so argumentative because I am agreeing with him. It is a good idea. I have thought so through five years of opposition and 12 years on the Government side.

The real initiative for timetabling Bills must come from Opposition parties.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Why?

Mr. Nelson: Because Governments obviously want to timetable their Bills and get their business through as soon as possible. All hon. Members on both sides of the House have an obligation to scrutinise legislation but, understandably, Opposition Members will have more interest in trying to delay it, because if they do not have the votes to defeat the Government, they will try to protract discussion.

Whichever party is in opposition next time, let us try to decide early to timetable more Bills. Let us not have pious words about timetabling Bills every time that there is a debate on a guillotine motion, only to find that nothing happens. The next Opposition party should agree more timetabling of Bills early in the new Parliament, and we should keep to it.

The reason for timetabling is not to satisfy the Government and Opposition Front Benches, but to protect the interests of Back Benchers. We lose out. Our amendments do not get proper consideration on Report or in Committee if there is a timetable motion. Invariably, new clauses will come first in the order of business on Report. Official Government and Opposition motions can crowd out amendments tabled by Back Benchers. There is not adequate opportunity for those of us who feel strongly about aspects of a Bill to raise them.

The answer lies in our own hands. In the next Parliament, let us do something about it, for the sake of Parliament, better legislation and refining legislation more adequately. In the House we serve no one's interests—not the Government's nor those of the people that we seek to represent—by cursory examination of Bills. As a result, hon. Members are left with the option of trying to inveigle their points in an artificial way. Important issues affecting our constituents' schooling and the structure and scrutiny of education are introduced in a wholly artificial and improper manner. The proceedings of the House should not be used for that purpose.

I want a change in the attitude of the Government to guillotines and in the Opposition's attitude towards timetabling. I am worried about the guillotine motion and the extent to which it will inhibit discussion on important matters later. Some of us will be unable to raise matters about which our constituents feel strongly.

Although my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) mentioned in interventions yesterday a situation in my county of West Sussex which is replicated in many other local authority areas, there should be an opportunity—within order—to raise matters of concern and to obtain assurances from Ministers about them.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) mentioned an important issue which has not received satisfactory answers in Committee, nor is likely to, in what will remain of the Report stage after the guillotine. There is no guarantee that we shall move beyond discussion of new clause 6 and the amendments taken with it. Opposition Members may well decide to make some progress and we may get to new clause 9 and to others further down the list, we cannot be sure about that. As a result, we have no other means of raising important matters.

Labour Members may state that it is the Government's fault for introducing the guillotine. It is not. I should like to have had time to discuss such matters, but the paucity of progress made yesterday, the long speeches and the many amendments which had to be considered left the Government with no option but to move a guillotine motion today. More rapid progress could have been made.

I shall not now be able to raise in the debate a subject that is of deep concern to my local education authority in west Sessex. Local education authorities carry out inspections more frequently than the four-year cycle that is likely to be provided in the Bill. I hope that, at the end of the debate on the guillotine motion, it will be clear that more frequent inspections can also be carried out. That view is shared by five other hon. Members from West Sussex as well, and I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) is in his place. Sussex Members and others have received strong representations from the governors and head teachers of numerous schools expressing great concern that inspections should take place only once every four years. In that period, negative and positive changes may take place to effect a school's performance. It is important that more frequent inspections should sometimes be possible in order to give continuing reassurance to parents and local charge payers about the educational and management standards of the school and the cost-effectiveness of the provision.

Mr. Flannery: The hon. Gentleman seemed to miss an important point when he said that head teachers were worried. The National Association of Head Teachers is with us. It does not want the Bill. We have found almost no teachers' organisations or teachers who want it. They do not understand the Bill; we Labour Members understand it and do not want it. The hon. Gentleman should not leave such issues out.

Mr. Nelson: I was not dealing with that important overall view, which the hon. Gentleman also expressed at length yesterday. My understanding of the Bill is that it seeks to improve the inspection performance of the worst authorities in the country by insisting on a minimum number of regular inspections of schools. That is wholly laudable, and I suspect that it does not divide the parties. Everyone wants to achieve that.

An issue that the guillotine motion will not allow us to discuss does not involve improving the average standards, but the fact that those local authorities that already exceed the minimum standard and conduct inspections more frequently than once every four years will be required to lower their standards. I am not happy about that. West Sussex has no quarrel with the Bill's basic objectives of raising the overall quality of schools' teaching and and attainment by changing the inspection system requiring all schools to be inspected periodically. The shortcomings and infrequency of inspections in many areas must detract from the quality of schooling, and the Bill clearly aims to raise the performance of the worst local education authorities.

However, the position in many parts of the country, including west Sussex, is different. We have more frequent reviews and inspections. My hon. Friend the Minister of State will vouch for the effectiveness of the scheme in West Sussex as only last week he commented most warmly on it. Every school has its management and national curriculum provision once a year by inspectors. There is a rolling programme of whole school inspections and detailed subject department inspections.

That more frequent inspection pattern enables better guarantees to be given to parents and local charge payers of the standards and effectiveness of schools. It success is partly demonstrated by the fact that school examination results in West Sussex ranked third in the country according to *The Times* performance league.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State will understand why there is reluctance to change a system that has served us well and to reduce the frequency of inspections from once every year to once every four years. Schools should

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be able to request more frequent inspections so that the best practice of a few is not brought down to the standard practice of the many. Such a policy should commend itself to the Government and my constituents, and I will be perplexed if it is not accepted today.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely difficult to explain to parents in our constituencies that the interests of their children are being better served by having inspections once every four years rather than once a year as at present?

Mr. Nelson: I feel bound to agree. It is extremely difficult for us to support a structural change that will effectively and perceptively reduce the frequency and radically change the rolling nature of the inspection system.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, but does he accept that the position is even worse? Under the Government proposals, not only will the cycle of inspection in West Sussex be reduced from one inspection every year to one inspection every four years, but if problems arise in a school between those inspections, the local authority will have no power to go into that school and investigate the problems.

Mr. Nelson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I shall come to that later. It is one of the glaring lacunae which we shall be unable to debate due to yesterday's performance and the necessity for a guillotine motion today.

To answer my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley, the only arguments that I have heard against my proposition that we should be able to continue with better practices and more frequent inspections if we so want is that it might lead to duplication and would provide an inadequate basis for performance comparison. It is also argued that a rolling programme of inspections is inferior to a full-blown, big-bang inspection once every four years.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have some sympathy with the West Sussex case, and I respect my hon. Friend's views, but I know that he would not wish to overstate the case. I hope that he appreciates that, under the Bill, the inspections every four years on the basis of the criteria drawn up by Her Majesty's chief inspector will not be the same as the annual inspections that West Sussex currently carries out. A typical West Sussex inspection is a day's visit on a taster basis to inspect some aspects of a school's performance.

There is nothing in the Bill to stop the West Sussex practice from continuing as long as the authority has the assent of the head teachers and governors. No one in West Sussex has led me to believe that there is any move there on behalf of the head teachers and governors to stop that process. It is a somewhat fanciful fear to read the Bill and believe that that system is under threat—*[Interruption.]* I am being barracked by Opposition spokesmen. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) certainly should not lend his weight to the argument of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who is advocating something quite different from the system used by West Sussex and is a leading Labour Member of Parliament in a county that carries out no inspections at all.

Mr. Nelson: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, but I had tabled an amendment, which will not now be debated and which sought in the simplest terms to redress that problem. I was told by the Government that they would oppose that proposal, as it was unacceptable to them.

My amendment, which cannot now be discussed, sought to ensure that, if we in West Sussex chose to have inspections more frequently than once every four years, we could do so. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State now says that we can do that. My amendment might have been defeated if it had been selected, but as a result of the guillotine motion we may not debate it.

I do not wish to be argumentative. It is certainly in my interests to try to find a way forward with my right hon. and learned Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who is looking perplexed. I hope that we can come to some agreement on the matter. If the intent of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is genuine, as I am sure it is, I believe that there is a way forward, and I shall go on to suggest it.

It is not in the interests of schools or local education authorities to duplicate inspections, even if they had the resources to do so. So we would not want a full-blown inspection every year. I can see that the comparative performance of schools in West Sussex and elsewhere might be assessed more confidently if the inspection were based on the same system of periodic inspections. It is the standard of quality of the inspection, rather than the interval between inspections, that will produce comparable assessments.

As for the Government's insistence on a comprehensive snapshot of schools once every four years, rather than a rolling programme of more frequent inspections, the Secretary of State has perhaps not fully appreciated how the existing system works in LEAs in West Sussex, and in the context of the guillotine, I am raising points on which it is hoped assurances will be given by the Government. It is relevant because our inspection programme has been developed to ensure that there is a systematic collection of evidence regarding pupil achievement through seven interlinked but separate inspection programmes.

That involves a whole school or college inspection, under which, each year, the advisory and inspection service mounts a number of whole school general inspections which give a comprehensive review of the quality of achievement and work in a single school. Those inspections are similar to HMI full inspections and result in a report that is available to parents, governors and the education committee. Every year, about four secondary schools, 12 primary schools and a special school are inspected in that way. That broadly equates with the four-yearly inspections proposed in the Bill.

Mr. Soames: I endorse the warning by the Minister to beware the point made by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), in whose area there are no inspections. Does my hon. Friend agree that the excellent aspect of the West Sussex system is that it enables the local authority to build a really comprehensive picture of the position on a regular basis at the most intimate levels, whereas an inspection in depth every four and a half years would provide no such perspective for parents, so that it would be deleterious for schools to go in for the proposed four-year programme?

Mr. Nelson: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am anxious not to stray from the motion, so it is difficult to go into such matters in detail. Under the guillotine, we may not have any opportunity to discuss the issues in which my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley and I, and many others, are interested. Having read the proceedings in Standing Committee, particularly on 17 December, I did not find adequately discussed the points in which we are interested.

It is important, in the context of the motion, to refer to those and allied issues, because the House must appreciate the way in which we in West Sussex operate. In addition to our whole school inspections, which apply to a number of schools every year, there are other components of our rolling inspection programme. They comprise the inspection of development and management processes; department inspections; family inspections which cover groups of schools and which are based on secondary transfer patterns; and surveys of single-issue matters, such as the implementation of the national curriculum and reports on classroom visits. For example, this year in West Sussex there will be more than 5,000 classroom visits looking directly at the work and standard of pupils. We also have so-called longitudinal inspections on the database of pupils.

Those issues are important in the context of today's discussion because they emphasise a point that did not emerge in the Standing Committee debates and may not be developed in any of the later debates in connection with the special circumstances in West Sussex. Our comprehensive and continuous system of inspection not only produces good results but flags up more quickly problems needing attention. Unless that continues to be possible under the Bill, or unless it is provided for in an assurance from the Minister, six out of the seven programmes that I have outlined will be in danger because of the imposition of the exclusive four-year inspection system.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I appreciate that, because my hon. Friend fears that he may not have an opportunity to speak later, he is anxious to expand now on the points worrying him. I attempted to reassure him some moments ago—as I did yesterday my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins)—that such matters are not threatened but can continue. My hon. Friend is worried lest the guillotine cuts out debate of amendment 59, which stands in the names of, among others, my hon. Friends the Members for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames), my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, who intervened yesterday, and my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) who also spoke yesterday.

I accept that that amendment is unlikely to be reached, because of the filibuster—*[Interruption.]*—and the consequential guillotine. Had it been reached, it would have purported to give schools the right to arrange for the inspections to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester has been referring. Our reaction would have been not to resist it but to say that the amendment was not necessary because schools have the right to arrange such inspections.

My hon. Friend said that the four-year cycle was exclusive. I am glad of this opportunity to make it clear that it is not exclusive. The powers that his amendment sought to give governors would have been resisted on drafting grounds—on the ground that governors do not require them because they already have them, as the appropriate authority, to arrange for such inspections to take place, in West Sussex or anywhere else, if they require such inspections.

Mr. Nelson: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, and it seems that we are getting there. His words will be read carefully in West Sussex. The LEA should have the right to continue—if its standards are in excess of the minimum provided in the Bill—a system of inspection which is well tried and is more frequent. If that means that there need not be any change in the practices in West Sussex, we shall be delighted. If that is the case—and the intent of my amendment, which I cannot now discuss, would have been in order—it is difficult to see why it would not have been accepted. I will go no further into that now because I am anxious not to try the patience of the Chair.

My right hon. and learned Friend may agree that perhaps it is possible to accommodate the West Sussex model by which there is a more extensive whole school inspection, with a residual right for schools to call in registered inspectors between four-yearly inspections. The practical problem may be the money involved in doing that, over and above the cost of the full four-yearly inspection for which the school will receive a financial allocation.

But if the registered inspector can do the job every four years more cheaply, money may be left over for additional inspections, or advisory services, in each of the intervening years. It is not clear from the Bill as drafted whether more regular inspection of that type could take place, even if schools could find the resources or if the LEA decided to ask local charge payers to pay more to finance such inspections.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I got the impression that, when he was referring to cash, the Secretary of State did not hear his remarks. The major distinction between what he and his right hon. and learned Friend have said is that the Secretary of State implied that the school would be able to carry out such services, whereas the hon. Gentleman wants the county council, on a systematic basis, to continue with such services. That is not possible under the Bill because of the removal of the section 77(3) power. A local authority will not be allowed under the Bill to run an inspection service —unless it is self-financing—if it tenders for four-yearly inspections and receives all its income as a direct result. Not only will there not be any power for it to run an inspection service, but the local authority will not have any money to do so.

Mr. Nelson: That is not what my local education authority has told me, and I would not wish to drive a coach and horses through what I regard as the laudable intention of the Bill—to which I know my right hon. and learned Friend is committed—to raise the average standards of inspection. I am merely saying that, when the minimum requirement of the law has been met, there is no reason to prevent a school or education authority from exceeding the required standard and providing a superior quality of inspection.

I do not wish to persevere with that argument, because it may not be entirely in the spirit of the timetable motion. Let me return to the strict terms of the motion.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Like West Sussex, Durham runs a very successful inspection service. Schools are inspected once a year. It now appears that, if West Sussex and Durham, for example, do not win the tenders from their schools, they will no longer be able to continue that service—in which case the additional service that the Secretary of State describes will not be possible.

Mr. Nelson: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, but, whatever may happen in Durham, I do not think that such circumstances will arise in West Sussex: my local education authority feels confident about that.

I do not wish to preserve the inspection rights of local education authorities as an immortal institution; I simply want the schools in my area to be inspected properly and adequately, and as frequently as possible. I want value for money, and if that can be provided by a registered inspector rather than a local education authority, I am all for it.

So far, I have dealt with the case for discussion, during the time allotted to us, of the merits of more regular inspection than that provided by the Bill. The hon. Member for Blackburn, however, has raised a related issue, about which the Association of County Councils has expressed some concern. I refer to clarification of the residual powers of local education authorities to enter schools when that is necessary. I consider it reasonable, and within the terms of the debate on the timetable motion, to ask my right hon. and learned Friend for further clarification. Clauses 9 to 15 of the Bill, and the repeal of part of section 77 of the 1944 Act in schedule 5, call those powers into question.

Under the 1944 Act, local education authorities are charged with a number of basic responsibilities. Those responsibilities include providing a varied and comprehensive education service in every area, ensuring that sufficient education is available to meet the needs of the population and ensuring that schools are sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide educational opportunities for all pupils. Those fundamental provisions have not been amended by subsequent legislation, nor are they amended in the Bill; but what will they amount to if local education authorities are specifically prevented from inspecting their own maintained schools, and are not explicitly empowered to go into those schools in pursuance of their broad statutory responsibilities?

My right hon. and learned Friend has sought to assure the Association of Metropolitan Authorities that education authorities' rights to enter in connection with their statutory duties will remain implicit rather than explicit. His letter to the association stated that, if a school unreasonably refused entry to a local education authority, the Government would be prepared to use section 68——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is now relating his comments to one of the amendments. He has remained in good order until now; I should be grateful if he would continue in that spirit.

Mr. Nelson: I shall endeavour to heed your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker. Let me just say that, as far as I am aware, the only amendment on which this narrow point about the right of entry could possibly have been discussed was ruled out of order. I must be careful not to address that amendment, which, for various technical reasons, was deemed to be outside the terms of the Bill. However, my right hon. and learned Friend now has an opportunity to clarify matters which he may not have later, and which was not provided to an adequate degreee either in Committee or in the correspondence that has taken place.

I do not consider the present position satisfactory. The only legal powers that are provided by section 68 of the 1944 Act are very narrow, and very rarely used: they take time, and they require referral. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House feel that, before we approve the timetable motion, we should enable my right hon. and learned Friend to confirm that the right to enter schools should be explicit.

Mr. Madel: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Nelson: Will my hon. Friend allow me to press on for a bit? I fear that I may so trespass on the patience of the Chair that I shall not manage to make some important points. I shall try to be brief, and I shall give way if an opportunity arises later.

Local education authorities—including West Sussex—do not claim a monopoly of inspection expertise; nor do they resist the principle of regular independent inspection. What they claim is the right to enter and inspect as and when they judge it necessary, at their own cost. Serious—indeed, heartrending—circumstances could arise in which such rights of entry would be necessary under the statutory residual powers. Abuses of various kinds might be reported, which individual schools might be reluctant to address for "image" reasons but which should nevertheless be investigated immediately. Furthermore, a school might falter in the intervening time between the four-yearly inspections. Problems can arise following the appointment of a poor head teacher; the head might be at loggerheads with the chairman of the governors.

In all such cases, education authorities must have a direct right of entry, which can be speedily implemented, to fulfil their statutory obligations. If something serious goes wrong and parents complain to the local education authority, is the authority to throw up its arms and say, "We have been denied an explicit right of entry to the school, and there is nothing we can do"? It would be very difficult for any of us to justify that to our constituents; indeed, it might result in tragedies that could have been avoided.

Mr. Madel: My hon. Friend mentioned the statutory provision of a general duty to provide education. Since the passage of the 1944 Act, two important additions have been bolted on: the delivery of the national curriculum, and the testing of children at seven and, in due course, at 11. Those duties must be performed properly.

Mr. Nelson: That is absolutely right. I am not trying to undermine the principle, or the practical provisions, of the legislation; I am merely saying that serious circumstances may arise in which the Government cannot be relied on to sort out the problem. In such circumstances, a right of entry should be provided explicitly.

For all those reasons, I believe that the Government must make it plain—as they failed to do in Committee—that local education authorities have explicit powers to enter schools and fulfil their statutory obligations. I hope that, if that cannot be done tonight, provision will be made in another place.

5.38 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The rebellion on the Tory Benches has not been on a large scale, but it has certainly been lengthy. I shall come on to the West Sussex question in a moment—although I assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I shall not deal with it at the same length as the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson).

Let me begin by referring to earlier discussion about how the present circumstances came about, and what could be done in the future. There has been a certain amount of disingenuous comment, but one thing is for certain—the guillotine will squeeze out proper debate of the important amendments.

Parliamentary business could be organised in far more effective ways. However, a system of simple agreement between the Conservative and Labour Front Benches is a system liable to block the alternative views of both Back Benchers and other parties. In discussions both last night and today, none of those views has been represented. Had they been represented, it is likely that we would not be in this situation now and the hon. Member for Chichester would have been able to move his amendment rather than borrowing time from the guillotine debate to discuss it.

We should be wary of reforms that introduce easy time-tabling, to the convenience of both Government and Opposition Front-Bench teams, because there is a risk that it would be used as a means to stifle rather than enhance debate. Inevitably, both Front Benches find that to their advantage.

The Secretary of State has not been able to give an answer to the West Sussex question. I am appalled that the guillotine motion will mean that there will be no debate on this. My only consolation is that, while the Government may be able to push the Bill through this House, they will not be able to push it through the other place.

There is an obvious logic to the question that has been posed but which Ministers have not answered. What is the advantage of moving to a system that, rather than enhancing inspections, reduces them? There is no question but that in West Sussex, as in other parts of the country, that will happen.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I keep trying to handle the West Sussex question sympathetically, partly by saying that the fears are unnecessary. In their enthusiasm to rush to the defence of West Sussex, people are grossly exaggerating what goes on there. The Bill institutes a four-year regular cycle of full inspections of every aspect of the school, its delivery, curriculum and management. It will take about a week for a team of inspectors to inspect a medium-sized secondary school. The West Sussex system is of inspections carried out once a year, with the consent of the governors, taking only one day and looking at the teaching of only one subject, such as maths. As I have already said, there is no reason why that system cannot continue.

It is absurd for the Labour party to imply that my hon. Friends with constituencies in West Sussex are suggesting anything that is in line with its policy, but it is equally absurd for the Liberal Democrats to join in with a grotesque exaggeration of a fantastic Rolls-Royce system in West Sussex that is about to be cut. When it is got into proportion, it will be found that the West Sussex question is a tiny one. I accept that I have so far failed to satisfy my hon. Friends that what they are defending is not being threatened by the Bill.

Mr. Taylor: I am glad that the Secretary of State made that intervention. If he were right in his portrayal of the effects of the Bill, he would go a long way to reassuring us, but he is incorrect for two substantial reasons. The first, which has already been addressed, is the financial difficulty that a local authority will have in providing such a system, because of the financial arrangements that the Secretary of State has announced. If he is to take the opportunity of the debate on the guillotine motion to announce a change in financial arrangements, that will be welcome.

In Committee, Ministers outlined a second and more fundamental problem. Again, it could be changed and, were it changed, that would go a long way to giving us a reassurance that would meet the basis of the question, although it would not necessarily tie up all the loose ends. It is that if registered inspectors and their teams within a local authority go into a school outside the four-year cycle —either because they are called in or because parents have expressed concerns—that would not be a formal inspection, because there is no role for that within the four-year cycle, so it would count as advice to the school from the local authority. That would mean that the inspectors who had performed the work would be debarred from making any other inspections of the school, on the ground that they had offered advice to it. That was made clear by Ministers in a debate in Committee on an amendment on the subject that I tabled on behalf of the Liberal Democrats.

A local authority wishing to maintain an inspection service to deliver the four-year cycle cannot afford to have inspectors going into schools at other times, because that will debar them from making future inspections and gradually wear away the ability of the local authority and its registered inspectors to provide an inspection service. Inevitably, local authorities will not be prepared to undertake that role.

It should not be difficult for the Secretary of State to make changes that would meet that objection without opening up the avenue of an alternative four-year cycle. I never argued that local authority cycles of inspections should be in competition with those called in by the schools. That would be a waste of money. However, in Committee, Ministers confirmed that any inspection outside the regular cycle would be counted as the tendering of advice, which would thereby debar inspectors from going into schools subsequently. That is a substantive point, but perhaps the Secretary of State will correct it.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I think that we are getting clarity. The local authority can have a right of entry and inspection, if one wants to call it inspecting, so long as that right of entry is pursuant to a statutory duty. That is implicit and does not have to be spelt out. The attempt to do so, by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), was ruled out of order. Secondly, governors have the right to invite local authorities to come in for any purpose that they think is necessary, including inspecting or giving advice.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a third point. It is that the Bill tries to separate the functions of advice and inspection for the reason that, if we relax that generally, there would be the absurd situation that we believe that the Labour party is advocating. People would advise the school between inspections and then make an inspection and commend their advice and the result of their labours to the parents.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) is saying that, if employees of the local authority have gone to a school other than when performing an inspection pursuant to their statutory duty, they will automatically be counted as advisers. I think that that is not correct—I shall check and come back later if I am wrong—because it depends on what they do. People are advisers only if they have been visiting a school for the purpose of giving advice. If they have been advising on a school's management or performance, they are not suitable to inspect the results of their advice. They cannot be deemed to be advisers if they have not given any advice about what has happened on previous visits.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The allocation of time motion allows only a narrow debate, but I am trying to be as generous as possible within the Standing Orders. I ask hon. Members to be sympathetic to the Chair and help it to maintain Standing Orders. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) is going into a great deal of detail about amendments. If he would relate what he is saying to, or complain about, the allocation of time motion from time to time, I should be happy to hear that.

Mr. Taylor: My point is precisely that we are not able to raise these questions because of the guillotine. It is clear from the debate so far that that is the case and that the Bill will not be adequately debated. I do not wish to cause you a problem, Madam Deputy Speaker, but, in view of the Minister's comments, I ask that he looks at the Committee debate on this subject, when the Minister of State said that that was not the way that it was expected that the Bill would be interpreted. His interpretation was that because the right of inspection is removed, anything outside that regular four-year cycle can be seen only as advice. Perhaps the Secretary of State will ask his advisers and reconsider the issue. If he is unable to come back to us during this debate, perhaps he will write to us before the Bill goes to another place, because it is an important issue.

Mr. Straw: I am sure that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) will recollect that it was made clear in Committee that schedule 2(3)(5) would exclude people who had given advice to a school from inspecting it. He will recall that the terms of paragraph (3)5 are very wide. It states:

"It shall be the duty of the registered inspector"—

the head of the firm—

"to ensure that no person takes any part in an inspection if he has, or has at any time had—

(a) any connection with the school in question, or

(b) any connection with any person employed at the school,

of a kind which might reasonably be taken to raise doubts about his ability to act impartially in relation to that school."

It is plain from what the Secretary of State says that if inspectors went to a school under the advisory powers now being offered to West Sussex, it would be difficult for the same people to undertake an inspection.

Mr. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is right. I can add to my list of complaints about the guillotine motion the fact that, because I did not expect the debate to occur now, I do not have with me the Committee references that would allow me to quote the Minister. However, the Minister has civil servants and, no doubt, his own records and he will be able to read for himself. He made it clear that a local authority could send inspectors to a school but that those inspectors would not be able at a later date to go back to the school as part of the regular four-year cycle. Inevitably, West Sussex or any other local authority would not be prepared to use its inspectors in that way because it would destroy its own inspection service by so doing.

It is deeply ironic that we should be debating a guillotine motion on a Bill which will more than halve the HMI and in so doing tear out its ability to visit schools in any number, on the very afternoon that the Secretary of State announced at a press conference—and he will shortly be doing interviews—the annual report of the senior chief inspector of schools. The report's introduction emphasises the fact that the quality of the report is underpinned by the 7,000 or so visits that HMI was able to undertake.

Guillotining the Bill will remove the ability effectively to consider amendments to a change which will wipe out for ever HMI's ability to undertake reports on that basis and of that quality. The Secretary of State welcomes the quality of information that HMI is able to provide, but he sits in on the guillotine motion of a Bill which will end that ability once and for all. That seems appalling. I hope that there will be a general election in time to stop the Bill and that, no matter who wins the election, the Government of the day will not introduce a Bill that affects HMI in that way and which removes its ability to offer the advice that has been valued for many years as independent and authoritative. It will no longer be authoritative, because it will not have the benefit of direct experience of schools on which to base it. There are many reasons to hope for an early election, but I feel strongly that that is one of the best.

5.53 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I listened with interest to the speech of the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and it struck me as the speech of a man who had not had the pleasure of listening to some of his hon. Friends speak last night. I suspect that, if he had, he would have changed his mind. Clearly, the reasons for the timetable motion—or the guillotine—can be found in the unreasonable behaviour of Opposition Members. There is little doubt that they filibustered, and I shall justify that claim on three specific grounds.

All three Deputy Speakers who last night supervised the debate had cause to bring Opposition Members to order for straying from the subject. I think that that must be unique. It must be the first time that each occupant of the Chair has had to bring Opposition Members to order. In my time in the House—going back to 1979—I have never seen a debate handled so badly by the Opposition. I also noticed that at least one hon. Gentleman was brought to order on two occasions—that was the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng)—and I feel that that is some justification for levelling a charge of filibustering.

I advance a second reason for the charge of filibustering. *Hansard* records the lengths of interventions from Opposition Members and some were longer than the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens). His speech was concise and very much to the point—what a contrast there was between his admirable speech and the interventions made by Opposition Members.

I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) in his place. I recall his being reminded by

the occupant of the Chair—on two separate occasions, I think—about the length of his interventions. Clearly, that underlines my point that there was filibustering last night. Even the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon), who is known in this place for his good manners and for his tolerant and friendly attitude, found it necessary to accuse the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) of filibustering; on that occasion he was right, as he is on so many others.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Give him a job.

Mr. Pawsey: I have no desire for a job, thank you.

The third reason to justify the charge of filibustering is the speech made by the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), which lasted for about 25 minutes and referred, among other matters, to an inspection of a school which took place in 1860. Hon. Members may ask what is the relevance to the Bill of an inspection that took place in 1860. It is also significant that the hon. Gentleman prayed in aid the earldom of Fitzwilliam. Again, that seemed to be straying from the point.

Nevertheless, I found the hon. Gentleman's speech interesting and I was able to discover that he, like myself, had served in the Royal Air Force. He also noted the educational improvements that have taken place in the past 40 years. I genuinely enjoyed his speech, but it was rather long-winded—indeed, it was longer than that made by his hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). Those of us who have sat through the hon. Lady's speeches will know that, at times, they seem interminable but last night her speech was shorter than that of the hon. Member for Wentworth.

Mr. Flannery: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: In a moment.

I dislike using the word "filibuster". It is an Americanism which has crept into our language only because we do not have an alternative word. I believe that an alternative is now at hand—the word "Wentworth". That has a good solid English ring to it. We should invent the verb "to wentworth"——

Mr. Burns: What about "to flannery"?

Mr. Pawsey: That is a competitor and perhaps we could conjoin the two——

Mr. Burns: To flannel.

Mr. Pawsey: —to flannel and to wentworth—and make it even more imposing.

Mr. Flannery: As a matter of fact, the longest speech last night was made by the Secretary of State, who spoke for 40 minutes. I was in a Select Committee when my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) was speaking, but the speech just made by the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) lasted for 34 minutes of the short time that we have available. To my knowledge he was pulled up at least twice for deviating from the point at issue. Why does not the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) mention that?

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted that I gave way to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery). Not for the first time, he has given me a perfect illustration of the verb "to flannery". That is splendid.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): A wet flannery.

Mr. Pawsey: Quite so.

Conservative Members want the Bill to be enacted. We want the improved inspection arrangements; we want parents to have more information about what takes place in the nation's schools, where their children—our children—are educated.

Professor Anthony King said recently:

"In terms of big ideas, Labour is travelling light to the point of nudity."

—I am pleased to say that the occupants of the Labour Benches are reasonably clothed at the moment. Professor King's remarks about Labour's lack of a big idea were borne out in last night's debate. We heard all the usual pious hand-wringing, the heart and breast-baring demands for a period of stability in education.

My hon. Friends and I found that extraordinary, because Labour is the party which wants, for example, to abolish grant-maintained schools. It is said that one of the first acts of an incoming Labour Government would be to introduce legislation—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) seems to be confirming that the Labour party would abolish grant-maintained schools—schools which have been established following a vote by parents.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Gentleman inform me how that relates to the allocation of time motion?

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you have given me the opportunity to describe the connection. You were present for much of last night's debate and will have heard how Labour Members prayed in aid all sorts of ideas. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) referred to a document which he claimed was Labour party education policy. Of course, that document refers to the abolition of grant-maintained schools, so that is why I made that passing reference, Madam Deputy Speaker.

If the guillotine had not been imposed, there would have been an opportunity, as we discussed some of the later clauses, to describe how the Labour party would abolish city technology colleges, grammar schools, the assisted places scheme——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I regret to have to call the hon. Gentleman to order for a second time so soon. We are speaking about an allocation of time motion. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know how to deal with such matters. I hope that he will now do so.

Mr. Pawsey: I apologise unreservedly to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for any discourtesy that you may have inferred from my remarks—it was unintentional, I assure you. I listened carefully to what you said, and I assure you that I will remain within order from now on.

I should have liked to reach the second part of the Bill, but, sadly, we may not now do so, because of the way in which the guillotine works. You have studied the Bill carefully, I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, so you will recall that the second part concerns information and schools, and will provide parents and others with greater knowledge of what takes place in local education

[Mr. Pawsey]

authorities and in the nation's schools. It is not surprising that the Guild of Newspaper Editors supports the principle underlying the Bill.

Sadly, the Standing Committee did not reach one of the provisions that I would have liked to have discussed, which refers to ethnic communities. I hope that when my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State replies to the debate, he will say a word about how schools and areas with large ethnic groups will receive the information that we feel that they should receive. Not all parents in such areas speak English as a first language. It is important that they, like other parents, are made aware of what is taking place in their children's schools.

It has been argued that tables comprising what is described as raw data are unhelpful because they do not provide enough information for a reasonable comparison to be made. I have two specific answers to that. First, it is an extremely patronising attitude. The implication is that parents have not the ability to make a choice, that they do not possess the interest, motivation or knowledge to make a reasoned decision. People should understand that parents are not as thick as Labour Members seek to have us believe.

Parents know about catchment areas, about which school has a large proportion of youngsters whose first language is not English. Parents understand those things and can make allowances for them, provided that the basic information is made available.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Can the hon. Gentleman cite one parents' organisation that supports the Bill?

Mr. Pawsey: I have not the slightest doubt that parents will rally to support the Act once it is on the statute book and they see and appreciate the benefits that flow from it. I served on the Committee on the Education Reform Act 1988. Labour Members condemned and opposed that Act. They said that it would mean the end of education as we knew it, yet now we know it to be a great reforming Act.

People who seek to discredit the tables must understand that, tables or no tables, parents will still make judgments about schools. The only difference is that such judgments would be based on information picked up at the school gate or on what other parents say at open evenings. In the past, there has been no real source of information, and the Bill does much to remedy that. The tables will be widely welcomed by parents as an essential tool to help them to select a school for their children.

The thrust and burden of the Bill is to improve the quality and standard of state education. Labour Members are suspicious about parents. They believe that only professionals should have opinions. I have news for them —parents want to know about the quality of individual schools and local education authorities, and we will ensure that that information is made available to them.

Labour Members want to treat parents like mushrooms, fed on a selective diet and kept firmly in the dark.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I should love to hear what the hon. Gentleman thinks about the motion under discussion.

Mr. Pawsey: It may be appropriate, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I now draw my remarks to a conclusion.

It was Chairman Mao who said that knowledge is power. Conservatives intend to put that knowledge into the hands of the nation's parents.

6.8 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): We have witnessed a spectacular own goal by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). His case for the Government rested on the assertion that we spoke for too long last night and had to be called to order. Yet three times during his speech you, Madam Deputy Speaker, called him to order, so his case has a huge hole in it.

I respect the hon. Gentleman and am happy to hear him speak. He was the only Conservative Back-Bench Member who was here throughout the debate last night, unlike those who intervened and then walked away, such as the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern). They had no interest in it. It is amazing that a Conservative Member should speak for 34 minutes and complain about the guillotine motion when he was not even here to listen to the debate last night. What hypocrisy.

I wish to speak on the guillotine motion and to complain that we have no opportunity to discuss the major problems. I wish to debate the issues that affect Scotland. Clause 17 has massive implications for Scotland. It is an enabling clause that allows the Secretary of State for Scotland to gather unrestricted information on what is happening in schools, including personal information about pupils, their families and backgrounds, and it could be open to abuse.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that he is now making his clause 17 stand part speech which he failed to make in Committee?

Mr. McFall: The Minister of State is perceptive sometimes, but his perceptiveness has departed from him tonight. I am complaining about the guillotine motion. I was here yesterday from 3.30 and I participated in every debate until 10 o'clock. The Government then panicked because they thought that the schedule for a 9 April election might not be adhered to. They therefore stopped the business, despite the fact that we were debating the Bill clause by clause.

I am not against the disclosure of information, but the Bill places no limits on the nature of the information that the Secretary of State may require. It empowers him to obtain and publish information as he decides, without democratic or parliamentary control. That cannot be right, and the guillotine motion offers us less opportunity to mould the Bill as we would wish.

Clause 17 enables the Tories' parents charter to be applied in Scotland. The Scottish public have been suspicious about Tory claims and their implementation of education for many years. The Government's response has been a cavalier disregard for the massive opposition to their education proposals in Scotland in the past four or five years. No matter what arguments are made against them or how strong the public opinion, the Minister of State, Scottish Office goes ahead with his policies and ideological love children, such as the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988.

The parents charter has difficulty in hiding the fiasco in Tory education policy. In Scotland there are no opt-out schools or city technology colleges, and two thirds of

children in state education last year did not take the national test. The current elections in Strathclyde and Grampian regions, to name just two, saw the collapse of school boards. In Grampian, 40 per cent. of the schools had no nominations, and in Strathclyde 67 per cent. had insufficient nominations.

I am against the crude statistics in league tables. Sadly, the Secretary of State for Education and Science and his Ministers have not listened to the educationists. Last night, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) spoke about international comparisons. The Secretary of State should consider them. In America, tests have been running for many years, and bitter lessons can be learned from them. Given the vigorous treatment by the press of league tables, which can be used to praise or pillory teachers and their methods, and given that statistics are used by estate agents to rate neighbourhoods, the scores can become very high, and the scores in American tests have become higher over the years.

If that is what the Government want, fair enough, but Opposition Members and educationists want to know how that has influenced learning. Teachers are under enormous pressure to raise the test scores and children in the United States are now trained in test-taking only. Where is the learning?

At Christmas, I read a magazine article on education in America, which gave an example of a question given to 17-year-old high school students. It was an objective test on America and the students were to choose their answers from boxes. The question was, "When did the first world war begin?" In one box the answer was, "Between 1900 and 1950", and 42 per cent.——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that he started his comments rather well, but this is a narrow motion and he has strayed a long way from it.

Mr. McFall: The last thing that I would want is to be humiliated like the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth.

I was saying that 42 per cent. of the children got the answer wrong, so that did not assist the learning process.

I want to push the Government on the issue of league tables and crude statistics, but I do not have time to do so. Are the Government simply intent on raising test scores, or do they wish to help the learning process of children in United Kingdom, particularly Scottish, education? I do not have time to push that issue. I am aware of your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker, and of the fact that other Members want to speak, but I object strongly to the Government's action in stopping the business last night when we were debating the Bill clause by clause. It does nothing for parliamentary democracy, and it certainly does nothing for the education of children. Will the Government think again about some of their proposals?

6.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): I am sure that I am not alone in having wondered, during the guillotine motion debates that I have sat through in the five years in which I have been a Member of the House, about the whole issue of timetabling. I listened carefully to the words of the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson), but I am unconvinced about the case for timetabling.

In the unlikely event that the Conservative party is ever again in opposition—I do not expect that to happen in my lifetime—I wonder whether we would be willing to relinquish the power that untimetabled Bills undoubtedly give us. I would be suspicious of any suggestion about timetabling in general and would not welcome such collusion between the two Front Benches. It would further limit and diminish the influence and power of Back Benchers.

It is most important that any Government who seek to move a guillotine motion should have to justify to the House their reasons for doing so, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House did this afternoon. The guillotine motion is richly deserved, because the events last night were a classic case for a guillotine. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend all yesterday's debates, but I served on the Committee, I have seen today's *Hansard*, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) has kindly filled me in on the debate.

Although there have been mutterings about whether yesterday's business was influenced by the forthcoming election, the rumour circulating on this side of the House last night was that the Opposition wished to frustrate the Bill's chance of reaching the statute book before the election. That played a large part in yesterday's strategy. Equally, it was strongly suggested that the events in the Chamber yesterday afternoon bore no relation to the matter under discussion. Rather, they related to a discussion elsewhere about the business for next week and whether it suited the Opposition Front Bench.

I am perfectly satisfied that a most monstrous filibuster went on in the Chamber yesterday when a matter of great importance should have been debated. I am sure that the Government were right to table the guillotine motion.

The Bill was well and effectively discussed in Committee. I have not sat on many Committees, I suppose, but I cannot think of one that has been more constructive and more harmonious than the one that considered this Bill. We addressed many of the points that have been discussed this afternoon without the necessity of timetabling. We discussed the issues raised in the Bill, and we had enough time to do it. There was little difference between the two sides in Committee.

When the television cameras were absent, when not many people were in the Gallery and when we got down to discussing the issues, there was precious little between us. By the exercise of great restraint on the part of Conservative Back Benchers, we had a chance to listen with interest to the arguments put by Opposition Members and to the very convincing arguments put by those on the Government Front Bench.

So there are few serious points left for discussion, and the timetable allowed for the Bill, together with the time that could have been spent much more profitably yesterday, is about right.

Opposition Members ought to be extremely grateful to the Government for timetabling the Bill, because it hides a great embarrassment for them. On one of the key measures of the Bill—clause 16, league tables—there is a massive, public split on the Opposition Benches. It has already appeared in this debate, and it was evident in Committee.

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

On the one hand, we have the hon. Member for Blackburn, (Mr. Straw), who is broadly in favour of league tables and is on record as saying that he wants to see a thousand league tables bloom. When I introduced my ten-minute Bill, with strong support from my hon. Friends, he made it clear that this was not a measure with which he strongly disagreed. He is on record as supporting, in principle, league tables.

We have, on the other hand, the second tendency, personified in Committee by the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery), who have been with us for most of the debate. They strongly oppose league tables and they set out clearly and concisely in Committee why they do not accept them. They did not vote according to their convictions but they set out their deep reservations about league tables.

A third tendency, closely allied to the second, is best epitomised by my own education authority in Nottinghamshire, where there is an odiously patronising attitude towards parents. The view of that authority, in hock, as so often, to some of the teacher unions, is that parents cannot be trusted with important information. If it is given to them, they will not use it responsibly or properly. As has been so ably demonstrated throughout the debate on the Bill, that is absolute nonsense and shows a complete lack of respect for the parents whom members of the authority are supposed to be helping, assisting and serving in discharging their duties as an education authority.

I will not attempt to test your patience on this matter today, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is extremely important that the Bill reaches the statute book as quickly as possible, and all those who have tried to promote league tables and emphasise the importance of getting more information to parents, to enable choice and opportunity in education, know this. The guillotine motion will ensure a speedy passage for the Bill through the House, and I look forward to its reaching the statute book.

6.23 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I oppose the allocation of time motion because the four major clauses of the Bill, out of the 20 clauses which concern the Welsh Office, have scarcely been debated at any stage. In Committee they were given only a few minutes, because my right hon. Friend—I should not call him my right hon. Friend, but I can call him my friend—the Minister for State, Welsh Office (Sir W. Roberts) was not a member of the Committee and therefore could not speak with his customary authority on these matters, being as he is, the longest-serving Minister of State in the Government or probably in any other Government in the history of Parliament. So there was no proper debate of these issues.

It presents a serious problem for those who seek to defend the unitary state and the way in which legislation for England and Wales and, for that matter, Scotland is dealt with here.

Before I came here, I had to learn my constitutional theory. We debated these matters in the late 1970s, at the time of devolution. It looks as though we may have to debate them again, whatever the result of the forthcoming election—and I can speak objectively because I am not standing at that election. I was taught that primary legislation is dealt with—scrutinised line by line—by the House of Commons; after Second Reading it goes to Committee and comes back to the House on Report. Secondary legislation—such as orders—is dealt with separately. The Welsh Office, being the Department of State responsible for nearly all education policy in Wales, then implements the primary legislation; but it is for Welsh hon. Members in the House, in London, to debate primary legislation as it affects Wales.

It is no news for me to announce in the House—I do it without fear of contradiction by the Secretary of State for Education and Science or by any other hon. Member—that there has been inadequate scrutiny of the four clauses of the Bill as they affect Her Majesty's inspectorate for Wales. That is why I feel confident that I am in order, Madam Deputy Speaker, and will not be subject to a "Pawsey"—our new term for someone who is often called to order by Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Although we have had inadequate debate, I should like to draw attention to the fact that creeping announcements, which might have formed a debate, have been emerging in *Hansard*. On Monday, there was a paragraph of an answer from the Minister of State on HMI in Wales, referring to its visits to 40 per cent. of primary schools and all secondary schools in Wales. We had an even longer answer—four pages of the best Welsh Office typescript—setting out the views of the Secretary of State on the future role of HMI. Unfortunately, I cannot detect, without reading between the lines of that answer—but I think that I am reading it correctly—what this actually means for the future numbers employed in HMI Wales.

I put this question on Second Reading in the form of an intervention and, quite rightly, the Secretary of State for Education and Science replied that the number of inspectors employed in Wales was a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales. I agree with him. Unfortunately, I have yet to receive an answer to my question.

The impression that I get from the long written answer is that there will be no change in the number of inspectors. The final paragraph of the answer to the question of the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) says that the Secretary of State for Wales expects that

"in due course there will be some overall reduction in the numbers of HMI engaged in work related to schools but it is not possible to be precise at this stage". [*Official Report*, 29 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 577.]

The rest of the answer talks of strengthening their independence, of their no longer being civil servants and of retaining existing terms and conditions; and it led me to the conclusion that there will not be a reduction of the present number of 60, made up of the chief inspector, eight staff inspectors and 51 inspectors, that we have at the moment. The Secretary of State is nodding. It might he helpful if I gave way to him.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I hesitate to intervene in these matters, which, the hon. Gentleman and I agree, are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, but he is not in the position which I am in, with our senior chief inspector, of having calculated a figure for reduction in the anticipated establishment of HMI. In the circumstances of Wales, the Secretary of State has no such figure at present, although he anticipates that the change in role might in due course lead to some reduction.

Dr. Thomas: I am grateful for that intervention which, will, I hope, satisfy me and some of my friends in the inspectorate. I had better not say "some of my friends" because, although I shall be leaving the House at the election, I am not suggesting that I am available as a consultant to inspect adult education in Wales.

I do not say that there is a conspiracy between the Front Benches on allocation of time motions, but I endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) and of the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) that, if we are to have serious debates on primary legislation we need an allocation of time for all Bills. That time must include some sort of block allocation to cater for minorities. It would not be right if the West Sussex minority had more attention in primary legislation than the Welsh minority or any other ethnic or national minority in these islands.

The Welsh Office may not want to advertise its policy too clearly, in case the Department of Education and Science finds out, as I think it has, that the Welsh Office is not pursuing the same policy on the inspectorate as is followed in England. English educationists might find out that the Welsh Office is not halving or privatising the inspectorate, or whatever words are being used. It might also not be in the interests of the Labour Front Bench to admit that the Welsh Office is pursuing consensus education policies that may well be more progressive than those of the Labour party in Wales.

6.30 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): Much of the debate has concentrated on the problems of West Sussex. I shall not go down that road, except to say that my father is a councillor on West Sussex county council, and I have no doubt that he will give me an ear bashing similar to that given by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) to the Secretary of State. I should like to speak about a part of the country with which I am even more familiar than West Sussex—the county of Humberside. I shall deal with how clause 16 relates to schools in that county and, in particular, in my constituency.

I looked forward to yesterday's debate and at any time between 2 am and 4 am I would have been happy to speak to the amendments to clause 16. I was delighted to see the guillotine motion, because it seemed to point to two days of debate at a sensible time when we would have been able to give proper consideration to clause 16. The problem with the guillotine motion, is that it is all-embracing. Such motions sometimes enable two or three hours of debate on one clause followed by a debate of an hour or two on another.

I do not object to the idea of today's business being guillotined. However, I wish that the motion had allowed for certainty of debate on clause 16, which deals with information about schools. That is one of the major clauses in the Bill and will be of great benefit to parents in a constituency such as mine. If there had been a debate on it yesterday, I should have liked to speak to it. We need it because it encapsulates the problems in some schools in Grimsby and Cleethorpes which take children from my constituency. In the past week or two, some head teachers in my constituency refused to make the parents charter available to parents, and that document does nothing but draw attention to the rights of parents.

Mr. Morley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later, because, like me, he represents a Humberside constituency.

Thank goodness for the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, which, in an editorial a few days ago, drew the attention of its readers to a disgraceful situation. It said that it would take upon itself the responsibility for ensuring that parents would find out more information about their schools——

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is speaking about some provincial evening newspaper rather than about the motion. I understood that he had to speak to the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Gentleman is right, and he is a short head in front of me: I was about to ask the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) what on earth this part of his speech has to do with the motion.

Mr. Brown: My point is that, but for clause 16, the opportunity to ensure that information is given to parents——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot make on the motion the speech that he might have made if we had been discussing clause 16 stand part.

Mr. Brown: I accept that, but I wish to draw to the attention of the House the relevance of my remarks to the motion. It is vital that that local newspaper publishes information about schools, because head teachers refused to do so. That is an outrage to parents. Thank goodness the Bill will pass to another place. I look forward to the vote on the motion because it will ensure that parents and children in my constituency will have the opportunity to receive information about their schools.

Mr. Morley: The *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* is an excellent paper, surpassed only by the *Scunthorpe Evening Telegraph*. The hon. Gentleman should know that local authorities are asking whether the parents charter is party political propaganda, outlawed by Government regulations. Humberside is quite right to be careful because it could be caught by the law for dishing out party political propaganda. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if we had had a proper debate yesterday all these issues could have been discussed and we would not have needed the guillotine motion?

Mr. Brown: Cabinet rules are strict on such matters and the Central Office of Information ensures that certain guidelines are followed by the Government. It is clear that the pamphlet could not be distributed unless it complied with the rules that are clearly laid down in the civil service. How could anyone object to a simple statement of fact?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think that we have had enough of that. Let us get back to the motion.

Mr. Brown: I have been in the Chamber for three hours, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during which the Chair drew my attention to the fact that it would be in order to range reasonably widely as long as our remarks related to the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have ruled on the hon. Gentleman's references to the parents charter. I hope that he will not dispute my ruling.

Mr. Brown: I would not dream of ever doing that. I shall simply draw the House's attention to one simple fact. The motion must be passed quickly to ensure that the Bill proceeds as soon as possible to another place. That will ensure that parents have the right to information about their children and that no head teacher will be able to stand in their way.

6.38 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I often speak after the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and often feel that he is filibustering even when he makes a serious speech. In this debate, he did exactly that. However, he has been beaten today by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), because his speech was a filibuster if ever there was one.

Well over 80 new clauses and amendments in 26 groups were tabled for discussion. Normally one can expect at least an hour for proper discussion of each group of amendments. The Minister's opening speech usually takes about half an hour, and when the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has had his say, there is not much time left for Back Benchers. Yesterday, we had before us 26 groups of amendments, which could have meant about 26 hours of debate. The debate that we did have was very much shorter.

I spoke for only three minutes, so I was not filibustering. Indeed, I had some very important points to make. In addition, I wanted to say some very important things about later clauses, but will now be prevented from doing so. The Government panicked at 10 o'clock last night, when they realised that they would not get the Bill through. I vehemently oppose this measure. I opposed it vehemently in Committee and will continue to do so. The Bill is flawed and should never have been put before the House and the country. It might have been improved a little with some new clauses, but the guillotine makes that impossible.

The proposed reorganisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate is fundamentally flawed. The question of private inspectors is without doubt being pursued for the sake of political dogma. It has nothing to do with education. In addition to the political dogma, there is now the fact that we are being prevented from discussing the proposals. The Bill will pass to another place without fair discussion of the ways in which it could have been improved. There is no doubt that improvement could have been achieved by some of the very reasonable new clauses that have been tabled.

I make no bones about the fact that I object to the league tables and to the use of raw data about schools. Neither parents, teachers nor pupils will derive any benefit from this system. Education itself will be undermined. During the three or four weeks of Committee debate, we identified at least eight areas in which major amendment is needed, but we are now to be prevented from discussing those. Let me outline some of the areas that we shall be prevented from discussing. First, all inspectors—from chief inspector down—should hold the status of qualified teacher, with experience in education in England or Wales and, as appropriate, knowledge of the Welsh language.

During the Select Committee's deliberations, the Secretary of State told us that he was quite prepared to have the local butcher as an inspector of state schools. If that is not political dogma, I do not know what is. The fact is that the Secretary of State does not give a damn about state education. He never has given a damn. He is not bothered about who inspects schools. He even says that the local butcher could do the job. But that is something that we shall not be able to discuss today, and in respect of which we shall not be able to put the Bill right.

Secondly, we shall not be able to discuss the fact that inspectors should be registered to inspect schools of the categories to which their qualifications relate, and that they should have relevant experience. Nursery inspectors will be able to inspect secondary schools, and secondary inspectors will be able to inspect nursery schools. What does a secondary inspector know about nursery schools? Nothing at all. Under the Bill, any inspector will be able to inspect any sector of the curriculum.

Thirdly, effective inspection of education necessitates an independent HMI, free from political control or manipulation. Inspectors must have power to report on all aspects of education policy in England and Wales. Fourthly, all inspectors should be subject to a code of practice. Fifthly, the coherence of local education authorities' provision of schools inspection will be undermined by the imposition of competition. *[Interruption.]* Every time I make a speech, I am pressurised. Let me assure the House that I shall try to finish very shortly.

My sixth area of concern relates to the fact that there must be safeguards to protect confidential information relating to individuals. Seventhly, inspectors should take account of the quality and effectiveness of the education provided by each school and of the resources provided for each school. My final point is that league tables made up of raw data have no place in a high-quality education service and will undermine our children's educational opportunities.

In Committee, the Government failed to pay attention to these flaws, and by using the guillotine tonight they are doing it again. We are being prevented from debating the Bill properly or altering it.

6.45 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): In two respects, this has been a revealing debate. First, despite all the Government's charges of filibustering, Conservative Members have today spoken for 65 minutes, whereas Opposition Members have spoken for 33 minutes—half the time taken by Government Members.

Yesterday we had the spectacle of the Secretary of State filibustering in the debate on his own Bill. He made the longest speech. Today we have had an even more interesting spectacle. Although Conservative Members have taken up twice as much time as Opposition Members, most of their speeches have been in opposition to the Bill. Yesterday, half the Conservative Members who spoke opposed the Government's proposals.

But the real reason for the Government's panic last night and their decision to railroad the Bill through the House today is the intensity of the opposition to it, not only from the Opposition but from Conservative Members. In this regard, I commend the hon. Member for

Chichester (Mr. Nelson) for his courage and eloquence. In a forensic speech, he simply destroyed the whole structure of the measure.

One of the reasons for our great regret at this guillotine motion is that we shall not have an opportunity to debate new clauses 10 and 20, which propose the establishment of an education standards commission to take over the work of the inspectorate and to supervise and direct the work of local inspectors. We are convinced that our policy for the future of inspection is robust. One of the reasons for our being so convinced is that the Secretary of State has to invent our policy every time he seeks to attack it.

A year ago, I commented on the problems of Culloden school in east London. The Culloden saga raises a very much larger question, which the Government have so far failed to address. I refer to the lack of any coherent system in England for the effective and consistent monitoring of school standards and teaching methods. I went on to speak of the haphazard national inspection arrangements, which are mirrored by even more haphazard local arrangements.

Then I spelled out the fact that Labour would establish an education standards commission, which, contrary to the canards, the inventions, of the Secretary of State, would ensure separate inspection services and would provide not only that schools were inspected on a regular basis in accordance with a set national standard but—to pick up a point made by the hon. Member for Chichester—that the best practice of authorities like the hon. Member's would be reflected in the practice of all authorities.

I do not approve of the fact that some authorities do not make provision for the proper and regular inspection of their schools. I reject that attitude, whether the authority concerned is Labour or Conservative. Under the aegis of an education standards commission, we shall ensure that every local authority has inspection arrangements that conform to a national and uniform standard. That standard will come into effect only with the approval of a national standards commission whose members are nominated by the Secretary of State and are approved by the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, which reports to this House.

We also object to the guillotine because of the insufficient time which it gives the House to debate the measure. The Bill dismembers Her Majesty's inspectorate and reduces it in size from 480 to 175. Because it is effectively being cut by more than half, there is no way in which the inspectorate can effectively supervise the arrangements which the Secretary of State proposes for a privatised local schools inspectorate.

A point made forcefully yesterday by the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Sir T. Raison) was that, contrary to the suggestion of the Secretary of State, the new HMI will not be independent but will become the creature of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State came close to misleading the House yesterday when he talked about independence and said that the new HMI might have to have regard to the directions of the Secretary of State. As the right hon. Member for Aylesbury pointed out, under clause 2(5) the senior chief inspector has no discretion. The Secretary of State may direct that he shall have regard to such aspects of Government policy on education or anything else as the Secretary of State determines. That, as well as the fact that the strength of the inspectorate is being reduced, undermines his integrity and independence.

There are three other aspects in which the Bill is fatally flawed. The smaller inspectorate cannot conceivably supervise the 3,000 or 4,000 local privatised inspectors who are expected to do the job. In a radio interview last year, the Secretary of State referred to

> "a whole new system of inspection, with inspectors, all of whom will have to be registered with HMI and all of whom will have to have a little lion stamp of quality given to them by a central Her Majesty's Inspectorate."

He also said that they would carry out 6,000 inspections per year.

The statement that all inspectors would have to be registered and would have to have a lion stamp of quality was untrue. It is only the heads of the privatised firms who will need to be registered with HMI. As to the rest, the Secretary of State admitted in evidence to the Select Committee that even a local butcher might do the job. What is astonishing about the Bill is that it specifies that some members of the inspection team should have no qualification.

The second fundamental flaw in the Bill is that the provider will pick the regulator. *[Interruption.]* This has everything to do with the guillotine. The Secretary of State wishes to truncate discussion and cannot provide an answer as to why he has come forward with a bizarre scheme under which the governing bodies of schools to be inspected will pick and pay their own inspectors.

I have asked a question of the Secretary of State three times, and he was asked it again three times on television. Each time he has failed to answer. I will ask him the question again; this will be the last chance to put it to him because of the guillotine.

Under Conservative policy for the regulation of public services, the Conservative Administration has insisted that, regulators are wholly independent and at arm's length from providers. That is why the Government insisted on appointing Oftel as a separate body from British Telecom, and why the Secretary of State voted that the Audit Commission and not local authorities should appoint auditors for local authorities. It is why the Secretary of State, as Health Secretary, refused the application of opt-out trust hospitals to be allowed to appoint their own auditors; he insisted that the Audit Commission should do that job. Yet under the Bill, the Secretary of State is allowing the provider of a service to pick and choose its own regulator.

For the seventh time, I ask the Secretary of State whether there is any parallel in the experience of the Conservative Administration for a public service provider being allowed to pick and pay its own regulator.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: For the seventh time, I will answer. This seems to be the only serious question which the hon. Gentleman can think of asking in the course of these filibustering proceedings. Our proposal is for independent inspectors, approved by HMI, who are separate from and independent of the schools. A school will seek tenders from two inspectors and will choose one to make an independent inspection.

The proposal of the Labour party is that the providers, the local authorities, should be the only people empowered to inspect. It is Labour party policy that the providers inspect the providers. That seems to be the only issue which the hon. Gentleman can think of on the Bill. He is going back to his Second Reading speech, which he has

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

made umpteen times before. He gives no indication of which amendments he wishes to talk about. He has run out of things to raise on the measure.

Mr. Straw: Every hon. Member in the House and many people outside will have heard that complete evasion of the question which I put to the Secretary of State. He has no answer, because there is no answer. There is no parallel to the measure in the experience of the Conservative Administration. It is eccentric even in terms of the awful experience of the Administration. Never before have they slipped down the path of allowing providers to pick their own regulators. We hope that they will never do so again. We know why the Secretary of State does not want the Bill discussed and why he seeks to avoid discussing it in public. No one understands how a system under which schools individually can pick and pay their own inspectors can lead to consistent standards of inspection.

The last fundamental flaw in the measure is that there is no provision for the inspection of a school in the middle of the four-year cycle of privatised company inspections which the Bill provides for. It is as though the Secretary of State thinks that, once he has the cycle running, problems in schools will emerge only once every four years, timed conveniently to fit in with the visit of the privatised company inspectors.

Serious points have been raised by the hon. Members for Chichester for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames), by the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) and by a great many Conservative authorities. What if the authority wants to do better than the privatised system of inspection which the Bill proposes? There has been no clear answer.

All we have heard from the Secretary of State is waffle about the other powers which local authorities may have, without any explanation of why he is removing the power of local authorities to inspect schools. If he is saying that they have other powers to inspect, and that they can inspect at any time, why is it necessary to remove section 77(3) which gives them an implicit power to inspect? If they have all those powers, and if they can go in at any time to inspect, why remove that power?

I think that the Secretary of State's explanation is that he does not want local authorities to duplicate the four-yearly cycle of inspection. He is nodding assent. He cannot have it both ways. If he is saying that, despite the removal of section 77(3), local authorities have power to duplicate inspections in the four-yearly cycle, he has no reason to remove section 77(3).

The truth, which is known by the Secretary of State's officials and by every local authority, including those that are otherwise benign towards this Administration, is that the removal of section 77(3) and the restrictions in clause 15 of the Bill will mean that authorities will have neither the power to inspect between inspections nor the money to pay for those inspections.

The consequence is that the Bill will become a charter for low and lowering standards in schools. It means that, if a problem arises in a school and the authority, against the wishes of the governing body, believes that a school should be the subject of an inspection, apart from a reserve power in the hands of HMCI, nothing can happen to that school. All that will happen is that the problems will get worse and may fester for up to four years. The Secretary of State has to address that problem much more seriously.

I will tell hon. Members why the Secretary of State is so resistant. He knows that the consequence is that schools will go uninspected and unsupervised for four years—in other words, for the lifetime of children in an infants school. So why is the Secretary of State refusing to allow the local authorities to have any serious role? I will tell my hon. Friends why. It is because he has a hatred of local authorities.

We have seen that hatred in other respects, including his removal of local authorities from health authorities and of any local authority role in respect of further education. We know from the hostility that, I am afraid to say, the Secretary of State shows to Conservative authorities that he dislikes and despises the idea that locally elected people should be there to speak up for the voters about the education service in their area.

It is ironic that we are debating a guillotine motion on a Bill which dismembers Her Majesty's inspectorate after 150 years of fine service to education on the day of the publication of the last fully independent report—if the Government were elected—of Her Majesty's inspectorate. The report spells out the need for a much stronger and more effective inspectorate, for it shows that 30 per cent. of children in our primary and secondary schools continue to receive a raw deal. It shows that standards have not improved in the past year and did not improve in the previous two years.

The Government have been in power for 13 years. They have introduced three major education Bills—in 1980, 1986 and 1988. In none of those Bills did they seek to do anything to reform the ramshackle arrangements for school inspection. So, in a panic and in their dying days, the Government are pushing through this ill-considered, crackpot measure to privatise the local schools inspectorates and destroy HMI.

The Bill will lead only to lower standards. There is no mandate for it. There is no justification for railroading it through. We shall oppose it in the Lobby tonight and repeal it on entry to office.

7.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The purpose of the Bill is to give effect to the parents charter. It makes new arrangements for regular four-yearly inspections of all schools, reporting back to parents, and new inspections for comparative tables of performance not only in examinations but in terms of truancy and staying on rates, destination of pupils and so on.

The way in which we have conducted our debates in the past day and a half so far of our proceedings, will make the public feel that the parents charter has been debated in a curious way by the House of Commons on Report. Indeed, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) that the readers of the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph* will probably have a clearer notion of what changes parents will experience than some people who read part of *Hansard*, because, although both sides originally agreed that one day was sufficient for the Report and Third Reading of the Bill, we have found it

necessary to move a timetable motion to get the proceedings back on the rails and finish them in reasonable time. That is because of what happened yesterday evening.

The hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), the shadow Leader of the House, spoke at the beginning of the debate. He was not present during the proceedings yesterday.

Dr. Cunningham: Neither was the Leader of the House.

Mr. Clarke: Neither was my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, but he was better advised about what occurred. *[Interruption.]* The absence of the hon. Member for Copeland yesterday is the only possible explanation for his disingenuousness. With an almost straight face, he tried several times to pretend that there was no filibuster yesterday evening. There is no point in our lingering on the matter, because the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) plainly acknowledged at 10 o'clock last night that there had been a filibuster.

We conducted our proceedings in a curious way. We began with new clause 1, which was moved by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong). At one point she agreed with me that we were discussing——

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: No. Let me explain. The hon. Gentleman needs to be better informed about what happened yesterday.

New clause 1 dealt with a narrow but undoubtedly important point about complaints. It gave rise to a three-hour debate, in which just about every aspect of inspection of schools was discussed. With great ingenuity, all those who spoke kept within order. We had a debate which, had it not been in order, might have sounded like a Second Reading debate on inspection of schools and the parents charter. It was rather reminiscent of the debate that we have just had. I am glad to say that my hon. Friends who represent West Sussex were particularly successful on both occasions in giving enormous amounts of careful and detailed attention to what is known as the West Sussex question.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: I will give way in a second. It is the hon. Gentleman's time that we are taking.

I then replied to the long three-hour debate. I replied with courtesy to every hon. Member who had spoken, including the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who had made a long speech about a new clause which did not apply to Scotland or Dumbarton. I was repeatedly intervened upon. If the hon. Member for Copeland reads the proceedings, he will see that, when I began to realise what was going on, I declined to give way when several hon. Members sought to intervene. I said in my simple way, as my usual trusting and naive self, that I was not sure whether the Bill was being filibustered, but that I would not allow the debate to go on any longer.

I answered all the points raised in that debate. Indeed, they were the same points that the hon. Member for Blackburn has just raised. After that, it became obvious that there was a filibuster, because the next three hours went by with meandering progress through the remainder of the Bill.

Mr. Straw: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: Wait a minute. The hon. Gentleman has had his turn. I am about to refer to him. If I give way too often, I shall be accused of speaking for too long.

The hon. Member for Blackburn, who has just sought to intervene in my speech again, described what would have happened if we had not brought proceedings to an end. He said of the Government:

> "If they had been willing to debate these matters through the night, as we were, and then to ensure that there was sufficient time next week, they would have got their Bill, but the truth is that they are now in total panic over this measure. They know that even with the guillotine tomorrow they have no chance of getting the Bill through the other place and then back here if an election is called for 9 April."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1040.]

The hon. Gentleman made it clear that he was trying to speak about the Bill as near to for ever as he could make it, and certainly into next week. He had mistakenly calculated that in that way he might prevent the Bill from completing its stages and receiving Royal Assent before the general election.

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Clarke: In a moment. There could be no other purpose of yesterday's proceedings. I give way to the hon. Member for Copeland. I hope that he realises that he is taking part in a debate which timetables a discussion which was filibustered in a fairly ridiculous fashion by the Opposition.

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for eventually giving way. Ministers' definition of filibuster seems to be rather like their definition of recession—something that was not occurring. I read the statistics into the record because, like the Leader of the House, I can also read *Hansard*. All the interventions and speeches made by Conservative Members are on the record for the Secretary of State to see. There was no question of filibuster on this side of the House. Again today, twice as much time has been taken up by Conservative Members as Opposition Members. Who is filibustering?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman cannot continue to deny that there was a filibuster—although he did so with apparent success in keeping a straight face—when I have just read out his hon. Friend's description of the Opposition's filibustering purposes.

If the Opposition had told us today that they did not wish to debate the timetable motion, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House would have moved it on the nod and we could have gone straight into the debate and had six and a half hours' further discussion of the amendments. But they did not. The Opposition decided to debate the timetable motion and use up the time for debate on the Bill. The reason is that if we had had a full and proper debate yesterday until 10 pm and then had another debate today until 10 pm, we would have had far more time on Report than the Opposition ever contemplated requiring or previously asked for. I have come to the conclusion that they do not wish to proceed to most of the amendments, because they have been exhaustively considered in Committee already or because they have been raised with ingenuity in the course of yesterday's debate on new clause 1 or in today's debate.

I was looking forward to debating new clause 10, which was the only other new clause that I intended to debate. The hon. Member for Blackburn has recklessly tabled what he says is the Labour party's policy on education. I

[Mr. Clarke]

do not believe that the Labour party has a policy on education worthy of the name. He was going to debate this amazing quango that the Opposition want to set up to do all the things that the Government keep thinking of and are bringing forward now. I suspect that the reason the hon. Gentleman has kept this debate going until after 7 o'clock is that he has realised that, if he is not careful, we shall reach it and have the chance of discussing, in order, precisely what the Labour party is putting forward, the pathetic rabbit of an idea that it has been peddling for far too long in response to our reforms.

The one point that has been raised persistently today is what I call the West Sussex question—the question of the rights of entry of local authorities and how far the new statutory arrangements for comprehensive four-year inspections and reporting back to parents might exclude other rights of entry or other inspection arrangements of the kind in West Sussex.

Yesterday, two of my right hon. and hon. Friends from West Sussex joined in and raised this point. Today, two more have raised it. They are all in their places now: my hon. Friends the Members for Crawley (Mr. Soames) for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins). Yesterday, they were joined by my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) and today by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel), who has also raised the question of league tables.

The pretence by the hon. Member for Blackburn that my Back-Bench col[illegible]re in some way agreeing with the Labour party's policy and going along with his attempt to drive a coach and horses through the Bill by providing for a local authority monopoly of inspection of local authority schools is ridiculous. This is a complete and utter myth. They are raising, as supporters of the Bill, the question of what will happen to other rights of entry and other systems of inspection.

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is anxious to use more time. Presumably he will claim that I have been making very long speeches. He need not worry. He will have plenty of opportunities to stop us reaching new clause 10. The standing commission will not be reached. He does not have to be so troubled. The Labour party's policy, which would take only a couple of minutes of our time if debated seriously, is not likely to be reached. He will find other ways of stamping on that debate.

When it comes to rights of entry, I have already repeatedly made it clear to the hon. Member for Blackburn and others that all local authorities will retain clear rights of entry where they are exercising a statutory duty or at the invitation for any purpose of the governors or the head teachers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West and my other right hon. and hon. Friends from West Sussex have asked about these rights of entry. I will not set them all out. Where statutory duties are concerned, they are very wide ranging. Under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, they have a right to require entry to check up on health and safety.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This debate is about a guillotine. It has nothing to do with the various aspects of the Bill. I hope that you will rule accordingly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A number of hon. Members have gone very wide, including the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw). None the less, I should be grateful if the Secretary of State would take account of what has been said.

Mr. Clarke: I will indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it really is rather perverse. My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester spoke for 35 minutes, completely in order, on the West Sussex question and we had several detailed exchanges on this. If I am allowed to say that the timetable motion will still permit us to discuss this if we make good progress on the rest of the rubbish on the amendment paper, to which I do not think that the Opposition seriously intend us to move on, they will discover that there are rights of entry under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, under section 37 of the Education Reform Act 1988, under sections 2 and 4 of the Education Act 1987, and so on. Any statutory duty enables a local authority to intervene. There can also be intervention at the request of the governors. The kind of arrangements described as existing in West Sussex, as I have repeatedly said, do not appear to me to be in any way threatened by the Bill.

The comprehensive four-year inspection for which the Bill provides is quite different from the annual visits to look at particular aspects of activities carried out in West Sussex now. If the schools invite the local authorities to come in, the West Sussex inspections will continue. If a situation arises in which, for some reason, the governors of a school do not want the local authority to enter, there are still grounds, if the Acts to which I have referred are consulted—where there are serious educational problems or doubts about the application of the curriculum—on which the LEA can enter under a statutory duty and ensure that all is well.

The other effect of our proceedings which, like my hon. Friends the Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and for Brigg and Cleethorpes, I regret is that we will not be able to get on to those parts of the Bill that refer to the so-called league tables—comparative tables of examination results, truancy rates, staying-on rates and destinations of pupils. It has become clear yesterday and today that one anxiety of the Opposition is so to conduct those proceedings that we never get on to the discussion of that particularly attractive proposition. Until a few months ago, it was the position of Labour local authorities throughout the country and, as far as I am aware, of the official Labour party that they were against the production of such information for parents—that the whole thing should remain secret.

No, I will not have the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) shaking his finger at me. He came in to keep this show going yesterday evening and read out his constituency correspondence in order to fill up a little time in the course of one of the new clause debates. That was not a filibuster, according to the hon. Member for Copeland. It was a perfectly reasonable speech in the context of the proceedings, of the kind that the hon. Gentleman invited me to make.

The Opposition's conduct will stop us discussing league tables. That is because they used to be against them, although some of their Front-Bench Members seemed to be in favour of them, but their Back Benchers, whenever they intervened, continued to attack the whole principle of making performance information available to parents and to the public in general. That is what lies behind the conduct of these proceedings. That is why we need the timetable motion. The Opposition have discussed all the details of the Bill and talked themselves to exhaustion. There are no remaining issues that they wish to present. They do not want to discuss league tables because they think that they are attractive to the general public. They do not want to reveal the fact that they have many backwoodsmen who would still prefer to keep all this information secret.

The Opposition are in confusion over inspection and they wish to conceal the fact that they are seeking to preserve the monopoly right of local authorities to inspect their own schools. They are against outside experts, approved by Her Majesty's inspectorate, who do not work for local authorities coming in and inspecting local authority schools and reporting back to the parents. Hon. Gentlemen have therefore resorted to these procedural devices to make sure that no further constructive debate takes place.

However, we still have some time for debate. The Opposition have used up the best part of three hours by choosing to debate the timetable motion. If they wish to prove me wrong, and they have any sensible contribution left to make, they have more than ample time within which to do so if the House agrees to support the timetable motion, which the absurd antics of the Opposition yesterday have forced the Government to resort to, to enable the Bill to be dealt with properly.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 271, Noes 183.

Division No. 61] **[7.19 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, C. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony

Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Illsley and
Mr. Thomas McAvoy.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:

Report and Third Reading

1.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in one allotted day and shall be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

(2) Stand Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Order of proceedings

2. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings on consideration of the Bill are taken.

Dilatory Motions

3. No dilatory Motions with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made on the allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Private business

4. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on the allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

5.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 above and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) the Question that all remaining amendments standing in the name of a member of the Government be made to the Bill;

(e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(3) If the allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(4) If the allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

6.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

7. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

8.—(1) Reference in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On the allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

9. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Education (Schools) Bill.

Orders of the Day

Education (Schools) Bill

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [29 January] proposed on consideration of the Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee). That the clause *(Additional provisions with regard to inspection teams)* be read a Second time—

'( ).—(1) The Chief Inspector may determine that a person who has completed a course of training in accordance with paragraph 4 of Schedule 2 is in need of supervision, induction or probation and he shall maintain a list (the "Conditionally Approved List") of the names of such persons.

(2) Without prejudice to the power of the chief Inspector to register a person subject to conditions under subsection 10(5)(c), the Chief Inspector may in particular impose conditions which determine the circumstances in which a person whose name is entered on the list maintained under subsection (1) may be a member of an inspection team for the purposes of Schedule 2.'.—*[Ms. Armstrong.]*

Question again proposed.

7.34 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I remind the House that we are also considering the following amendments: No. 62, in clause 10, page 6, line 32, at end insert—

'(6A) Nothing in this section is to be taken as preventing the Chief Inspector from imposing conditions under subsection (5)(c) which determine the eligibility of persons acting as a member of an inspection team assisting the registered inspector in conducting an inspection in addition to the provisions regarding such eligibility mentioned in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 of Schedule 2 to this Act.'.

No. 10, in schedule 2, page 19, line 17, at end insert —

'5A.—(1) The Chief Inspector shall not admit to a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) or 5(1) any person, not being a registered inspector, who in his opinion is not a fit and proper person for the purpose of carrying out an inspection.

(2) Any person admitted to a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) or 5(1) shall be excluded from it if, in the opinion of the Chief Inspector, he is unlikely to qualify for a certificate under sub-paragraph (3).

(3) Any person who has completed a course provided or arranged under paragraph 4(1) and 5(1) and who, in the opinion of the Chief Inspector, is adequately trained for the purpose of carrying out inspections under this Act, shall receive a certificate to this effect.

(4) No person shall carry out an inspection under this Act unless he has received a certificate under sub-paragraph (3).'.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Before I was rudely interrupted 21 hours ago, I was trying to conclude my comments on new clause 6, referring particularly to the excellent arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Knowlsey, South (Mr. O'Hara). He raised five points which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science will no doubt answer.

My hon. Friend spoke of the process of selecting inspectors, the training of registered inspectors, the cascading of training, not only to team leaders, but to other members of the team, the breadth and skills of the inspection team and the finance and support for training. Those points all relate to standards and ensuring not only that we have high standard inspection teams, but that the standards are regular and consistent across the whole education system.

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

The Secretary of State for Education and Science spoke earlier of what he called the West Sussex question. I note that when he raised that question he soon dropped it and failed to answer it. He does not seem to have done too well on the standard assessment test at that stage. The West Sussex question is crucial because it is about how a local authority, providing good quality inspection, can maintain its system. That does not relate only to West Sussex, but to many other parts of the country.

The Government's proposed system lacks two essential features. The first is a guarantee about the standards of inspectors and inspection; the second is any system of management to follow up that process of inspection.

The hon. Members for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) and for Crawley (Mr. Soames) made powerful arguments against the Bill and its proposals. It is clear that the Bill has little support among Conservatives in shire counties with responsibility for education. It is also true that the Bill has little support among Conservative Back Benchers. We saw that yesterday, as few of them were prepared to speak in the debate to support Ministers.

The Government are isolated on the issue because there is no guarantee of quality or standards. At a time when we know from HMI's annual report that about one third of children are having a raw deal from the education system, it is necessary to have an inspection system that guarantees high and consistent standards. That is why we tabled new clause 6. I hope that the Minister will answer the question how we are to ensure that standard and consistency of inspection.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I shall speak on this important matter as I have often been the subject of inspection by Her Majesty's inspectors and have in my family someone who has been a distinguished inspector of schools, universities, and other branches of higher and further education for almost 40 years. I am therefore close to the work of Her Majesty's inspectors throughout their long history.

As I listened to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), I could not understand why the standards so well set by Her Majesty's inspectors could not continue under the device established by the Bill. I think that it is reasonable to assume that the inspection teams will comprise people with gumption who have a proper understanding of how schools operate, the tasks that teachers face, how schools respond to educational and curriculum challenges, as well as the challenges posed by the locality in which they operate.

If we cannot assume that the teams established as a result of the Bill cannot respond to the demands placed on them, which I have partly described, we might as well pack up. I do not see why the devices set out in the Bill—linking members of Her Majesty's inspectors to the new teams to show them the way, and train and assist them in their tasks—should not work. There is no reason why the teams established by the Bill should not improve considerably with time because they will work so hard and so consistently.

The team members will not have to work partly in schools, partly in offices, partly in Whitehall and partly in other parts of the country as Her Majesty's inspectors have always had to and still do. Instead, they will be on the job most of the time, which of itself will ensure that the teams achieve continually improving standards. That will provide the sort of guarantee that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central said was not in the Bill.

The fact that they are doing the job, and were prepared to do it when they began, will ensure continuity and guarantee consistency. It will also guarantee that parents and schools have the sort of information that such inspections should produce and to which the public are entitled. So the pessimism of the hon. Member for Leeds, Central is misplaced.

It is wrong to think that only professional experts in school matters can be inspectors. Historically, that is not the case. Some of the greatest headmasters and headmistresses have come from outside the profession. We in the profession did not like it when, for example, Dame Margaret Miles was appointed by the inner London education authority as headmistress of Mayfields school. We thought that she could not possibly do the job, not having been a teacher. In the event, though having come from outside, she proved a most successful head, ILEA having made a good appointment in that case.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed many matters concerning education over 10 years as members of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts. I am staggered by what he has said and feel sure that, if he and I were still teaching—we taught for many years—he would be one of the first to object to what is proposed by the Government in the Bill. Schools will be advertising for teams to inspect them. I suppose that, if a team produces a good report, it will be hired again. Perhaps one group of inspectors will prove cheaper to employ than another. Having been a teacher for so many years, I cannot understand how the hon. Gentleman can agree with what is proposed, because it is alien to everything educational. It introduces the market place in the classroom.

Mr. Greenway: I do not see it that way. Why should schools opt for the shoddy and unsatisfactory? I assure the hon. Gentleman, with whom I have discussed education in all its aspects over the years, that I would have been happy for school heads to be elected by teachers, rather than appointed by governors. I cannot imagine teachers employing a head who was soft or who could not do the job. After all, as a teacher, one would suffer greatly if one appointed a head who was not up to the task.

Despite our resistance to the appointment of Dame Margaret Miles—I can recall others, but I will not go into that now—she came from outside the profession and became a very good head indeed. There was no point in our complaining that she had not been in the classroom prior to being appointed. As I say, she turned out to be a successful head.

People who have not taught or worked in schools in the way that we have can still know what schools are about and what standards should be achieved. We shall not have ridiculous people appointed to teams. If people are appointed who cannot do the job, they will not survive as team members, so I have confidence in the device proposed by the Bill. Although the hon. Member for Leeds, Central spoke with integrity, his comments were misplaced. It is a pity to challenge in advance the teams who will do the job. They have every chance of being satisfactory and making an increasingly valuable contribution to our schools.

The fact that schools will be inspected once every four years—instead of once every 200 years, as has notionally been the case hitherto—represents an improvement. In any event, we no longer want the sort of school inspections that in my experience, used to take place, with lofty HMI teams coming in, not making proper contact with teachers and filling everyone with dread. That type of inspection was not of the highest value. The inspectors did not get through to the needs of the teachers and the problems of the children. While they may have understood the needs, they did not communicate adequately with teachers in the most helpful ways. For all those reasons, I support the Bill's inspection proposals, which are sound and should be given every opportunity to work.

7.45 pm

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): I was a teacher for 20 years. I taught under Conservative local authorities in Surrey and the old West Riding, and latterly under a Labour-controlled authority in Wakefield metropolitan district. In all three authorities I found the inspection service thoroughly satisfactory and extremely helpful. That goes for the local authority service and the essential back-up of HMI.

I have the highest regard for the HMI, which is composed of men and women of integrity, perspicacity and, above all, honesty. I have never shared the fears of HMI that some have expressed. On several occasions, I collaborated with the inspectors because I found them totally helpful and constructive. When pursuing what might be described as something of a wild educational idea, they would put it down quite rapidly and were good at pointing out the error of one's ways, but doing so in a positive way.

So I greatly regret the passing of the inspectorate. Indeed, I cannot understand how the Government could have got themselves into the position of heedlessly throwing away a jewel in the educational crown. I could not understand it until I looked into the backgrounds of the three Ministers responsible. I discovered that they have in common something that may make them antipathetic towards local education authorities. They all went to schools which were members of the Headmasters' Conference.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) went to Epsom college, of which I have fond memories, because there was a strong Young Socialist group there who campaigned to get me appointed to the local council in Epsom. Alas, the group was not entirely successful, and I should make it clear that the Under-Secretary was not a member of that Young Socialist group at that time. The college motto is "Deo non fortuna", which may be translated roughly as, "My God, you must help us because nothing else will." That is precisely what the Ministers concerned must be saying about this measure.

The Minister of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), went to Winchester. "Manners makyth man" is the motto there, and we know some of the strange men whom Winchester has produced. We need not now go into the eccentric views of life that some of them have. Nothing they do bears any relationship to their experience of Her Majesty's inspectorate.

The Secretary of State attended Nottingham high school, "Lauda finem" being its motto, a good translation of which might be, "Thank God it's finished." That is precisely what the Secretary of State has been saying constantly—that he wants discussion of the Bill over and out of the way. He wants no argument or discussion. That is a disgraceful aim, because the antipathy to LEAs is destroying a valuable asset.

I accept that some LEAs are stronger than others, just as some areas of the country are richer than others. It is one of the laws of life that some are bound to be better than others; they cannot all be exactly the same. By and large, however—under both Labour and Conservative control—authorities try to do a good job, and are able to keep their feet on the ground. That is why the advisory and inspection services have been so valuable at the lower level.

I do not shrink from the Secretary of State's sneers about the local inspectorate. Of course some inspectors and advisers will not be as strong as others, but, on the whole, they have proved to be well qualified for their tasks. Before appointing them, we have looked for the qualities that will help to raise education standards.

The old West Riding education committee was Conservative-controlled. That doughty lady, Mrs. Fitzpatrick, is a great supporter of the Conservative party, and in her day was a leading light of that party in Yorkshire. Under her leadership, the inspection and advisory service flourished: it proved helpful in many ways, and was always available not only to give advice about school subjects, but to engage in troubleshooting.

Troubleshooting was certainly required—especially when that great Conservative-controlled education committee was setting up comprehensives, which it did so successfully. The Secretary of State said earlier that he wondered why Labour opposed league tables. I am not worried about proper league tables; if the Secretary of State wants to be put in one, he should compare the school that he attended with those attended by his junior Ministers. I suppose that, in comparison with Epsom and Winchester, his school is in division 4, northern selection. A school will prove itself within a community—good or bad.

When I was helping to set up a new comprehensive in Featherstone in my constituency—where I spent the past 12 years teaching—we had to compete with the existing grammar schools. There were eight for pupils to choose from. In the end, the pupils voted with their feet; not because we had published spurious league tables, but because the local community knew that we were damned good, and that their children would be treated better in a comprehensive school than they would have been in the old grammar schools.

That was largely because grammar schools were very suspicious of inspectors: they did not like to let them in. What happened under the streaming on which the Secretary of State is so keen? The A stream did all right; half the B stream did okay; the C stream was often consigned to the dustbin. And we are talking about the top 15 per cent.—the ones who were chosen.

Time and again, inspectors and advisers said that grammar schools would have to change their ways, because they were destroying people. The grammar schools took no notice. In the comprehensive system, we did take notice: we considered a mixture of setting and banding. It was the local advisers who helped us to set up that system, which sent far more people to university than the previous arrangements.

[Mr. Derek Enright]

My real worry about the inspectorate is this. Three Ministers will be putting a political complexion on what the inspectors do—and that worries me, because the inspectors are directly accountable to the Ministers; they are not independent of them. We have already heard enough of Ministers talking about the curriculum, and then finally getting down to the individual syllabus—to the detriment of that syllabus. Certainly, they do not help educationally in any way: I suspect that their knowledge of the workings of education could be contained in a thimble, and a small one at that. It seems that the sole contribution of the other Secretary of State was to deplore the fact that children watched "Neighbours". What a fine intellectual contribution that was.

This is a shoddy Bill. I shall vote against it, and I hope that Conservative Members will have the courage to do the same.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): In Tower Hamlets, we have 21 full-time local education authority inspectors, and one part-time inspector. They were drawn together carefully, and trained to inspect, advise and help school teachers.

What are those inspectors to do? They do not know what the future holds. If money is to be transferred to the schools, will money be available to keep them in place? Should they go into business and try to set themselves up as leaders of inspection teams? They would probably be deemed over-qualified; they would know too much about schools and education.

What training will those teams of inspectors receive? How long will the training last, and what will it cover? What will replace the irreplaceable—experience of teacher training, and experience in schools? As I said yesterday, I am very much afraid that people will set themselves up as inspectors in entirely new businesses, with no guidelines on how to price the job. They will not want to overprice it, so they will go for cheap staff—unqualified staff.

Every adult has some opinion, or prejudice, about education, based either on that person's past education or on what he or she wants for their own children. Those opinions and prejudices often do not stand up to what really happens in a classroom. There is nothing to replace teaching experience and teacher training when it comes to learning what is possible and what is not.

I have a dream. I would like to see the Secretary of State in front of one of the ever-larger classes of east London kids—bright, lively kids. I should like to see him trying to put some of his ideas into effect. He would soon learn a bit more about what is and what is not possible in education.

It is important for teachers to have respect for the inspectorate; otherwise the inspections will be of no value. I do not think that teachers will have respect for the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker—people who are pig-ignorant about education, and who, after a short training course, will start telling teachers what to do. Often, what they tell teachers to do will be neither practical nor possible.

I am worried about the damage that will be done in schools by inexperienced people with little knowledge of education—especially to the most vulnerable teachers. Older teachers are already nervous because, under local management of schools, they are the most expensive. They feel that they are under threat. Younger teachers also feel vulnerable, because they are inexperienced and have not yet built up their confidence. Allowing people with no real knowledge of education, apart from a short inspectors' training course, into schools to criticise teachers, advise them, tell them what to do and report on them will damage a great many of our precious teachers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): We began this debate some hours ago: indeed, the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) has had an extra 24 hours in which to improve on the speech that he began to make last night. In the end, he was reduced to repeating some of the stronger points made by his hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), which I shall deal with in a moment.

The only serious point that the hon. Member for Leeds, Central tried to make concerned his worries about who would guarantee standards, and who would manage the system. The answer to that is clear. I do not criticise the hon. Gentleman, who did not serve on the Standing Committee, for not having read the Bill. In schedule 2, he will see that HMCI will be the guarantor of standards and will, in effect, be the ultimate manager of the system.

8 pm

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who knows the education service, did not have those worries. His speech demonstrated great confidence in the system that we are proposing and an open-mindedness about the crucial inclusion of the lay element in inspection that I should have liked to have heard reflected a little more widely in the debate.

The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) implied that the HMCI for England and the HMCI for Wales would be creatures of Government. Whatever other accusations the hon. Gentleman levels against the Bill, I assure him that that will not be the case. They will be independent statutory office holders for the first time, with departments of their own.

The hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) worried about the future of those who are inspecting in the present system, shortly to be the old system. The best guarantee of the future of any inspector, wherever he works, is the knowledge that the Bill will ensure that inspection becomes a growth business. We shall be increasing the number of inspections of our schools. Wherever they are, in whichever LEA, they will all be inspected every four years, to a nationally approved standard, rigorously upheld by HMCI. Any local inspector worth his or her salt should have no fear for his or her future.

Mr. Gordon: Business is the key word. Many of the inspectors do not want to go into business. They do not see themselves as business people, nor education as a business. The HMCI will have to operate, even if he is not a creature of the Government, within the parameters of this bizarre Bill.

Mr. Fallon: Yes, HMCI will operate within the parameters of the Bill, but not to the direct diktat of any Secretary of State, whether Labour or Conservative.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South, who spoke to the new clause some hours ago, made a speech that was neatly summarised—I do not know why—by the hon. Member for Leeds, Central. All the five points that he

raised relate to quality control. He will recall that we spent a great deal of time in Committee discussing the way in which quality control would be exercised over both registered inspectors and their teams. We explained then that the detailed arrangements for securing quality control of school inspection teams will be for HMCI to determine. The Bill supplies a basic framework by making the chief inspector responsible for the registration of inspection team leaders, for the training of them and of potential team members, and for the production of national guidance on the conduct of inspections within which teams will operate. We said quite clearly during the discussion in Committee that it will be for HMCI to decide the basis on which potential team members will be accepted for training, and deemed to have completed the course.

To suggest, as new clause 6 does, that HMCI should also maintain a list of those whom he considers to be "on probation", or in need of special supervision or induction training, and that he may attach conditions to their employment as inspection team members, although well meaning, is yet another attempt by Labour Members to place on the face of the Bill aspects of quality control that are properly for HMCI to determine.

It may well be, as I said in Committee, that HMCI will want to keep a particular eye on certain inspectors who have completed the training. How he does that will be up to him. In an extreme case—if a registered inspector seemed to wish to persist in using an inspector who was not in HMI's view competent—HMCI might impose a condition requiring him not to be employed. Whether he chooses to act in this way will, however, be up to HMCI; it is not for us to prescribe in statute.

The other important safeguard is that it is for the registered inspectors to be confident that those whom they employ are up to the job. The registered inspector knows that his livelihood depends on the quality of the team that he chooses to work with him. If he is successfully to tender for this business, he cannot afford to carry weak or unsuitable team members who will not inspire confidence or help him to win contracts. An incompetent team member might cause him to be struck off the register as no longer able to conduct effective inspections. The registered inspector is best placed to judge on the basis of experience over time, whether a person is able to make a satisfactory contribution to the work of a team.

HMCI will of course see the reports to which team members have contributed, and will join inspections during which they will see team members at work, but this is no substitute for the day-to-day contact which the registered inspector will have with his team or teams. The focus of HMCI's monitoring will of course be the registered inspector himself, as the person responsible for the quality of the inspections that he conducts.

It is also likely that HMCI will, from time to time, advise on the need for updating in particular areas, and will expect both registered inspectors and team members to take advantage of whatever training they recommend in that respect. Here again, the prime responsibility for ensuring that team members are fully competent and continue to up-date their skills and knowledge as necessary will rest with the registered inspector.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South made the fair point that a registered inspector will always be working with exactly the same team, so I must say a word about that. The registered inspector will have to choose his team according to the inspection task in hand. There will be those who are qualified to inspect in some subjects—I pick ancient Greek at random—who are likely to be working on a far more intermittent basis than those whose specialty is, for example, French.

That does not invalidate the argument that the registered inspector is best placed to judge the competence of a team member. If he finds someone's work unsatisfactory, even on the basis of one inspection, he is likely to be wary of using that person again. Furthermore, that inspector will not find it easy to gain further work if he has not obtained a suitable reference from his previous team leader.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): The Under-Secretary has slightly misunderstood me. I was talking not about the registered inspector who might have different members of different teams but about the team member who might work for different inspectors on different teams. I spoke about the problems of controlling the quality of the varying team member.

Mr. Fallon: I understand that. As I said, the primary control is with the registered inspector who is leading the team and who must at all times satisfy himself that the team member is competent and efficient. The ultimate control is with HMCI, on whom that crucial registration depends.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Two points arise from that. First, if there is a personality clash and the registered inspector feels that a person is not competent, that member of the team could be disadvantaged because of the opinion of one person—the registered inspector. Secondly, if the registered inspector feels that someone is not appropriate to be on his or her team, what procedures are envisaged to inform other registered inspectors of the incompetence of that member of the team?

Mr. Fallon: I hope that the hon. Member will forgive me if I say that I find his first point somewhat schizophrenic. Most Labour Members have been worrying about whether the competence of the team member will be good enough. Again, it is for the registered inspector to satisfy himself that he is employing competent people.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I said that a team member would be unlikely to obtain further work if he was not able to furnish a reference from his previous team leader because that is the first thing for which the other registered inspector to which the hon. Gentleman referred is likely to ask.

I deal now with amendment No. 62. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) is not here. I recognise that he has shifted the content of the amendment from that of a similar amendment that he moved in Committee, but this one suffers from the same disadvantage. If I understand the hon. Gentleman's purpose aright, it is to make it clear that the chief inspector can define the types of qualifications, experience and expertise that team members should have for particular inspection tasks—for example, for examining special units in main-stream schools or specific subject areas or age groups—and that the chief inspector should be able to enforce such guidance by making it part of the conditions under which an inspector is registered.

We made it clear in Committee that the way in which HMCI uses his discretion to set conditions and guidelines will be up to him. We should expect him to include—this

[Mr. Fallon]

may assist the hon. Members for Truro and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), who is standing in for him—in the national guidelines for the conduct of inspections guidance on the nature of the team required to inspect different types of school and the competences to be expected of team members.

One condition expected to be attached to each inspector's registration is that he and his team should then follow the national guidelines in carrying out inspections. Of course, all will receive training which will be designed to give them a full working knowledge of the guidelines and their implications, and the inspector and his team will then be monitored by HMCI and by the school authorities which employ them to ensure that they observe the guidelines in practice and are competent to offer an accurate report on the school.

Therefore, it is for HMCI to set out the necessary competencies in his conditions and guidance. This is a matter which we are properly leaving up to him. I assure the House that he has all the discretion that he needs to set any of the conditions that he wants. The Bill does not fetter him in any way; so, although the amendment has been refined, it is not necessary.

Amendment No. 10, on the training of inspectors, falls into the same trap as new clause 6 in seeking to set out further rules and conditions within which HMCI must work.

I repeat that no one will be able to serve on an inspection team unless he has completed an approved course of training. It follows that HMCI will want to issue some form of written notification that training has been completed. The details of how that will be managed are for HMCI to determine. If HMCI believed that an applicant was not a fit and proper person to take part in school inspections, he would not allow that person to join a course of training.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is not it clear that these courses will be extremely rigorous, that they will deal with highly specialised areas and that what my hon. Friend says should be interpreted in that context?

Mr. Fallon: I am happy to confirm that, especially to those who have come only recently to the debate. Schedule 2(4) states that nobody will be involved in an inspection or be able to conduct an inspection of a school in England unless he has completed a course of training provided by the chief inspector or a course of training that complies with arrangements approved by him. I hope that that gives my hon. Friend the assurance of rigour that he seeks.

HMCI can also be expected to ensure that obviously incompetent candidates who get through any initial sift do not complete the course of training. That is simple common sense, and I suggest that there is no need to provide for it in legislation. On that basis, I invite the Opposition to withdraw the new clause.

8.15 pm

Mr. Fatchett: The Under-Secretary accused me of having limited knowledge of the Bill because I have not served on the Committee. He offered that as an apology or an excuse for me. No similar excuse can be made for him. He is the Minister, he introduced the Bill and served on the Committee, but apparently he has very little knowledge of the Bill. I presume that the Government put him on the Committee so that he could not do any further damage to the education system if allowed to run wild in other directions. Certainly it has not improved his knowledge of the Bill.

The Under-Secretary claims that the chief inspector is unfettered in his powers and activities. I remind him that clause 2(5) allows the Secretary of State to give powers of direction to the chief inspector and that he must follow those directions. That does not seem to be an unfettered relationship.

Mr. Fallon: We debated clause 2(5) at some length in Committee. Had the hon. Gentleman been a member of it or had he read the clause a little more closely, he would know that the chief inspector for England does not have to follow the Secretary of State's directions—he must only "have regard" to them. He does not have to comply with the directions issued by the Secretary of State. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will now correct what he said.

Mr. Fatchett: I did not serve on the Committee, but I read the report of the debate, so I remember the exchange between my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and the Minister of State. Perhaps the Under-Secretary was not present at the time, but if he understood anything about the legal interpretation of statutes, he would know that "have regard to" is virtually a mandatory obligation on the chief inspector. The chief inspector does not have unfettered powers. He is wholly fettered in that respect.

The Under-Secretary also said that the Bill contained a system of management. I suggest that he reads schedule 2(10) about action plans. He will find that there is no process of management whatsoever after an inspector's report is made on a particular school.

The best summary of the Bill was made not by the Under-Secretary but by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) last night: the Bill is potentially incestuous. The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) was desperately looking for reasons to support it. He asked for some assurance that in the majority of cases the inspectors would be up to the job. The Under-Secretary said, "Yes, in the vast majority of cases." That may be true, but we are concerned about all cases. We want every inspector to be up to the job. We are not satisfied with any other guarantee.

The Bill contains the incestuous ability to maintain low standards and to give people an interest in maintaining low standards. We shall now force a Division on new clause 6. The reason could not be summed up better than by the final comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South last night. He gave the example of the advertisement doing the rounds of the inspectors, which says:

"V. cheapo licensed plumber and HMI schools inspector. All types of schools and drains inspected. Estimates free. Guaranteed customer satisfaction. Very keen prices."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 1032.]

That is why we support new clause 6—we want standards and guarantees of standards.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 143, Noes 229.

Division No. 62] **[8.18 pm**

AYES

Anderson, Donald	Armstrong, Hilary
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boyes, Roland
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Cartwright, John
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faichett, Derek
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Loyden, Eddie
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Pendry, Tom
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooney, Terence
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie and
Mr. Frank Haynes.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans[illegible]Keith
Map[illegible], John
Mar[illegible], Tony
Mac[illegible]all, John *(Hendon S)*
Mar[illegible]all, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Ma[illegible]n, David *(Portsmouth S)*
M[illegible]es, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

New clause 7

ADDITIONAL DUTIES WITH REGARD TO SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

'( ).—It shall be the duty of any registered inspector conducting an inspection under section 9, when requested to do so by the Chief Inspector, to report—

(a) as to whether proper practices have been observed in the compilation of information required to be provided under section 16 by the proprietor or governing body of the school; and

(b) on any other matter connected to such information required under section 16.'.—*[Mr. Murphy.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

8.30 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy (Torfaen): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause refers to the additional duties of privatised or registered inspectors, especially in relation to the information required to be provided under clause 16 on the so-called league tables.

The new clause will ensure that schools are compared and proper practices adhered to, and it goes to the heart of the Bill. In the past two days, there has been much reference to the benefits and good aspects of the Bill. The new clause touches on the very essence of the competitiveness of the proposed system and the market forces that will govern education in England and Wales. It is a safeguard against the excesses of the folly of the Bill. The people of Wales involved in education, whether teachers, parents, inspectors or anyone else in the education world, are deeply opposed to the Bill and would be very much in favour of the mitigating effect of the new clause.

The Bill is opposed by the Welsh branch of the Association of County Councils, the Assembly of Welsh Counties, the Welsh County Education Officers Society, the Welsh National Union of Teachers, and the Welsh division of the National Association of Head Teachers. Indeed, all those who know anything about education in the Principality believe that the Bill is fundamentally flawed and that the new clause will be a means of mitigating some of its worst effects.

The Government have, however, chosen to impose their dogma on Wales, when not a scrap of evidence suggests that we need either league tables to compare secondary or primary schools, or private companies of inspectors to do a job that has been done successfully by Her Majesty's inspectors of Welsh schools since 1907.

League tables and the proposed privatised inspectors are based on the marketplace rather than sound educational principles. The Government have sculptured the education service in the Principality into a monument to market forces. A school's viability will now depend not on its educational worth but on the number of pupils that it attracts, and open enrolment and local management of schools provide the preconditions. In turn, viability will depend on the school's so-called "success" based on the ludicrous and silly notion of league tables comparing schools. Pupils will be seen as a financial resource and teachers will "teach to the test". All 59 of our Welsh inspectors will be drawn into that ludicrous and daft jungle.

Schools will go for the cheapest and least stringent inspectors and the divide between our poorer and more wealthy areas will be widened even further. The relationship between pupil and teacher and between inspector and school will be reduced to the cash nexus.

Those market forces and a privatised inspectorate would not produce proper information for a useful comparison between schools. That is why if, by any chance the Bill becomes law, the registered inspectors would have to look at the nature of the information.

Today, the Secretary of State for Wales, in an answer to a written parliamentary question by the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), announced some details about how the inspectorate in Wales will be organised. What he said is inadequate and unsatisfactory. The creation of private companies of inspectors will fly in the face of more than 80 successful years in the history of Welsh education. The Welsh Office has ignored that, and we are deeply concerned that there is no commitment to a distinct Welsh inspectorate like the one that has existed for nearly 100 years. We compare that with the situation in Scotland, where the Government have already committed HMI Scotland to continuing. In Wales, the distinctive flavour of a Welsh inspectorate will be overturned because of a written parliamentary answer.

The Secretary of State has still given no date when the system will be introduced and the Welsh Office is deliberately suppressing the Valerie Adams internal review into the Welsh inspectorate. We have asked the Secretary of State many times to reveal what is in the report. The Minister of State, Welsh Office said only last week that he would not give the House or the people of Wales the results of that internal survey.

HMI in Wales, which is deeply threatened by the Bill, has been responsible for much that is good in Welsh education. Recently, when the House considered the GCSE and the national curriculum, the Welsh inspectorate gave our curriculum a distinctly Welsh flavour. For example, it initiated a GCSE in Welsh history in the English language, which is taught throughout Wales.

Welsh inspectors advise on research projects specific to Wales and successfully liaise with schools, colleges and universities.

There is a consensus on education in Wales. We have no teacher baiting, there are very few opted-out schools and there is little enthusiasm for the views of the Centre for Policy Studies. A dogmatic system of education has been foisted on us by the English Department of Education and Science and it is not wanted in Wales. From 1993, the Welsh Office will have responsibility for all Welsh education. With a curriculum council for Wales and a strong and vigorous HMI in Wales, much could be achieved. But much will be destroyed by the Bill.

If the Government insist on league tables, new clause 7 is vital. Otherwise, schools will go for the cheapest and less able inspectors. We must also take into account the present cost of inspections in the Principality. Given that it takes six months to plan, inspect and report on a school, and that some 15 to 20 inspectors may take part in the inspection of an average secondary school for about two weeks, we estimate that the inspection of an average secondary school in Wales costs about £80,000 and a primary school costs about £40,000. Where on earth will schools in Wales, which must suffer under the burden of local management, find that much money for proper inspections? It simply will not work.

The Welsh people deserve better. We do not want our schools to be inspected at the cheapest price, and we do not want to see an end to our Welsh inspectorate. We want an education standards commission to be set up in Wales, which will stand for independence, professionalism and the highest possible quality. The Welsh people will overwhelmingly reject the proposals at the forthcoming general election.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I did not have the opportunity of serving on the Committee on the Bill, and I want to intervene only briefly to comment on clause 7. When my hon. Friend the Minister of State replies, he will comment on whether this clause would allow the inspectors to act in something like an advisory role? I am very much in favour of all that the Government are doing in the Bill, and I am most disappointed to have heard the comments of the Opposition spokesman, who does not want to see examination league results.

It has been a great shock to the people of Bolton to find out that their primary schools came out so low in tests on seven-year-olds; we came out in the bottom third of the country, when we are used to coming out in the top third. Is it possible for inspectors who have a good deal of knowledge to give a little advice where such advice might be needed?

I have in mind one or two schools which could benefit from a bit of additional promotion. A very good primary school in my constituency is Egerton county primary school. The headmaster, Mr. Brian Hall, had an opportunity to meet my hon. Friend the Minister of State. I have been asked by Mr. Hall to present to the Minister a memento of his visit to Bolton, which I have here. I should like to give this excellent promotional material for the school to my hon. Friend, who is now taking his seat on the Front Bench, at the end of this short debate.

Is it possible for a school such as Egerton county primary school to be given some advice on how it can promote itself? It is an excellent school but, although it has over 100 pupils and gives a good education, it is affected by falling school rolls. Would it be possible for such a school to be advised by people such as inspectors on whether, for instance, the small school special allowance could be managed in a way more favourable to the school? Although it is in a metropolitan area, it might perhaps be more easily looked after as if it were a rural school because of its location on the northern edge of the borough where there is no high density population immediately adjacent to it. If the school suffers a severe reduction in numbers it can be seriously affected by the way in which the reforms work.

Will my hon. Friend comment, therefore, on whether inspectors could help fulfil, under the new clauses, any sort of advisory role or whether elsewhere in the Bill there is provision for inspectors to help schools in that way? We would welcome anything in this Bill which would help such schools to promote and improve themselves.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): If I had known that the hon. Gentleman was going to bring in a tea towel and hold it in front of himself as if he had something to hide, I could have brought in a matching tea towel. They are obviously generally on sale. A company, I think in Birmingham, must have been distributing them round schools. I was given one by one of my godchildren for Christmas. So far it has hung on the kitchen door, but if we really have to go in for this, I suppose I too could bring one in and wave it around.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I must discourage this sort of presentation in the Chamber.

8.45 pm

Mr. Hughes: I was indicating that I had not thought of bringing in a tea towel, but obviously the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) thought it a good idea.

I want to speak in support of new clause 7. I support the specific wording of the new clause and am sympathetic to the points made by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). He will know, I think, that I owe the majority of my school education to the Principality, in Glamorgan and in Breconshire. Educational standards, which in Wales are generally far higher than in England, together with the Welsh education tradition, must be retained at all costs. The Welsh inspectorate has certainly done a good job.

What I want specifically to do is push at a door which I believe is already partly open. I wonder whether I could have the Minister's attention to this specific point. New clause 7 seeks to add to clauses 9 and 16 the possibility of reporting on specific items in relation to schools. Clause 9 of the Bill as drafted makes it clear that the inspections cover city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts; that is clear from clause 9 of the Bill as drafted.

Clause 16 of the Bill as drafted says that the Secretary of State may exercise his power to make regulations under this section, and shall do so with a view to making available information which is likely to

"assist parents in choosing schools for their children"

and, in clause 16(3),

"increase public awareness of the quality of education provided by the schools concerned and of the educational standards achieved in these schools."

The Minister may be aware that at present there is no requirement that city technology colleges should operate

[Mr. Hughes]

an appeal system against refusal of admission. I raised this matter at Education Question Time the other day with the Secretary of State, and I had a helpful reply. He said,

"I will certainly consider the . . . point, because it is our aim to put CTCs on a level with others in regard to funding and other aspects." [*Official Report*, 28 January 1992; Vol. 202, c.803]

The clear implication is that because they are publicly funded, at least in part, all the same criteria should apply to CTCs and their users as to other state-funded schools. I ask the Minister as a matter of urgency to consider this. I appreciate that it cannot exactly be done by means of the funding as set out in the new clause, but it comes within the sort of issue that is being probed by the new clause and by my question. Will the Minister consider amending the Bill before it finishes its passage through Parliament to require an appeals system against refusal of admission to city technology colleges?

It will be useful to know—it does not require publication of names—how the appeal system works and how many appeals succeed comparatively across the country. Such information may follow, but it is not clear that it will follow from the Bill as drafted. There is an appeal system in all other schools, and comparative data as to what percentage succeed and fail would be useful. It could not, however, be done in relation to city technology colleges because there is no requirement for such a procedure.

I have talked to the principal and staff at Bacon's college in Docklands, and I can tell the Minister that one of the complaints about the present legal structure, procedure and regulations is that there is no provision for any re-hearing of applications for admission which are turned down if, as happens, a city technology college is a popular school and is likely to have a full roll and full admissions. It is vital to have some clearly independent way of reviewing the decisions about selection made across the range.

We have had debates and differences about CTCs, and I do not tonight want to go into those issues again. I do not want now to argue again the merits of city technology colleges. I simply want to press the Minister tonight to say that he will be serious in joining his Secretary of State in seeing whether, before the Bill completes its passage, this omission in the original legislation can be corrected and pupils and their parents in this one category of school, looked after by inspectors and included in this legislation, can have the same rights as pupils and parents in other schools. I do not think that the principle is objected to, so I hope that we can agree on establishing a new practice. It must be done now if it is to be of any benefit to those who are currently applying with a view to admission from September 1992.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I want briefly to mention some points that concern people in Wales who are not themselves education specialists like me but who have inspectors as constituents and who obviously have a large number of parents as constituents too.

I am particularly concerned by the slapdash nature of the statement produced by way of a substitute, namely, in a written answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) instead of being made in a proper statement to the House. It is not good that there is no Welsh Office Minister here tonight, but possibly the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State will be able to answer my questions.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Is it not offensive that what has been said about Wales was actually released in a written answer that, had the House proceeded as was intended in the original timetable, would not have been seen by Welsh Members until after the debate had ended? The Welsh Office is trying to stifle debate in the same way as it is trying to stifle publication of the report.

Mr. Morgan: My right hon. Friend rightly mentions the precedural inadequacies and the way that legislation has been slipped through as if Welsh education was some sort of afterthought by Tory Ministers. After the election, the Tories will be an afterthought for the people of Wales, which will perhaps be poetic justice.

The Valerie Adams report, prepared by a distinguished former Ministry of Defence civil servant for the Welsh Office, was heavily critical of the ideas for privatising HMI. Everybody in education knows that. We are not allowed to see that report because we are only MPs, whereas Welsh Office Ministers think that they are superior to everyone else and cannot allow those who represent the people of Wales to see that report. That is an appalling slight and puts paid to any idea of democratic debate. The Minister of State shakes his head. Perhaps he thinks that no reports should be published. What a wonderful advertisement for open government and the citizens charter.

The written reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) covers two full columns of *Hansard*, but is mostly long-winded educational gobbledygook. Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State, who represents Darlington, a well known area somewhere on the northern edge of north Wales, will be able to explain it. The only place where the answer attempts to tell the people of Wales how the new privatised or semi-privatised inspectorate of schools will work is where it says:

"much will depend upon the rate at which local authority advisory and inspection services are able to adapt to the requirements of the new system, and upon the availability of independent registered inspectors able to work in Wales. I intend to keep the situation under review."

There is the smack of firm government. What is meant by

"independent registered inspectors able to work in Wales."?

Obviously the Secretary of State for Wales has worked out that there is a difference between Wales and England because of Welsh language, history and culture. He mentions that in the first part of his written answer where he says that HMIs have to be different from those in England because of the

"distinctive features of the education system in Wales, notably Welsh-medium education and the teaching of the Welsh language and Welsh history and culture."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. 576-77.]

That is so obvious that even the Secretary of State can work it out, but he is ignorant of another major difference between HMI in England and that in Wales. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are a bit slow on the uptake and ask me to speak more slowly. However there is pressure of time.

The Secretary of State's reply does not mention that the inspectorate in Wales covers primary and secondary education while in England the inspectorate cover primary or secondary. There is no reference to that essential

difference, which has existed for 80 years, and it is because the Welsh inspectorate is much smaller and has to be more flexible. How will that be handled under the new system? The Secretary of State has not thought it necessary to refer to that other major difference.

Scotland is to be allowed to continue with its inspectorate which will not be messed about by the right-wing ideologues who advise the Conservative party in these matters, whereas it was thought that Wales was suitable for experiment. Most people in Wales believe that, as in Scotland, the education system is essential for a society which still lags 15 per cent. behind average incomes in the United Kingdom. It is an essential part of the way that families in Wales believe that they can produce a future for their children that is better than the future they had. The same belief exists in Scotland, and that belief has led Scottish Office Ministers to think that they must not tamper with the inspectorate in Scotland. Scotland has been totally left out of the legislation but Wales has been dragged in.

It could be said that Scotland's education system is even more different from the rest of the United Kingdom than that of Wales because it has a longer and more distinct history. However, by and large Scotland does not have a great linguistic difference between it and England. Therefore, there was every reason for totally exempting Wales from this ideological right-wing Tory nonsense.

I shall now deal with the nature of the inspections. The Secretary of State for Wales is not in the Chamber, although he is in the House. In his written reply he said that the working of the new system would depend upon the availability of independent registered inspectors who were able to work in Wales. I assume that he thinks it would be wrong to bring in people from Amersham, Birmingham, Cornwall or other places to inspect schools in Wales because, quite apart from not understanding the language, they would not understand the distinct aspects of education in Wales. If that is what he meant, he should have said so, and said that the inspection service in Wales will have to be Welsh-based. The Secretary of State is really saying, "Well, we do not know where we will get these inspectors in Wales, and I want to keep my options open."

If no new inspectors suitable for the privatised system emerge in Wales, what will the right hon. and learned Gentleman do? He says, with the smack of firm government, that he intends to keep the system under review. Is that the basis for legislating? This is the United Kingdom Parliament whose Members are expected to report to their constituents on the laws that they have passed even when they do not agree with them. In this case, we do not know what has been passed or how the new system will work in Wales, because the Secretary of State does not know. It all depends on how many new inspectors emerge.

If new league tables emerge in Wales, they will inevitably be used as they have been used in America, where they have become part of the marketing system for schools. Schools will set easy tests so that they can say that most of their kids have passed them, and the next generation of parents will want to send their children to those schools. That is what happens in America, particularly in the inner cities where there are too many schools because of the white flight to the suburbs. If league tables are used as part of marketing to get more kids on the rolls and schools say that by hook or by crook kids will pass the exams, they will need sweetheart inspectors to approve of what they are doing.

We shall produce an education system with an inherent temptation to corruption and the propensity to conclude sweetheart deals with inspectors. That will be followed by the marketing of bent examination results, which already happens in the private education system, to make it attractive to parents who want to get their children through examinations by hook or by crook.

Mr. McFall: The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), who came in with a tea towel for an apron, reminded me of a report that I had read. I want to refer to a couple of damning comments arising from a comparison with American education. In an article in *The Independent*, inspectors are reported as having said:

"School principals said, on a number of occasions, that they would rather have good publicity than extra funding."

It is the marketing, the glitz, that matters. In this regard, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East showed us what he means. Education will take second place.

Mr. Thurnham: I should not like the hon. Gentleman to be left with the impression that the school to which I referred has anything but the very highest standards. My message was that that point had to be conveyed to the parents of pupils and potential pupils. The school has very high standards.

9 pm

Mr. McFall: I do not impugn the integrity of that school or the qualifications of its staff. What I am concerned about is the trend that the Bill will encourage. We do not want gimmicks such as are employed in America. The issue is one of statistics. The parents charter requires schools to publish statistics—for example, annual statistics on truancy—but statistics can be produced in an inaccurate and misleading way. That is why we are concerned. The provision that we are putting forward seeks to audit the accuracy of the schools' records and to permit comment, even when the records are accurate, on whether a school may be manipulating the figures. For instance, existing requirements to publish information are thought to be widely abused by means of practices such as the exclusion of pupils from examinations unless they are confidently expected to pass.

New clause 7 refers to proper practices. The term "proper practices" is borrowed from section 15 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982, which prescribes the functions of the Audit Commission. It is standard wording, which applies to other areas of local government and to the duties of the Audit Commission. We ask the Government to take this point into consideration.

The Bill provides no mechanism for checking the accuracy of school-produced data. As has been said, schools can produce misleading data—data transmitted to the Department of Education and Science but, in the interim, corrected by local education officers. For the purpose of correcting such information, we submitted in Committee information in respect of which the Minister said that section 68 of the Education Act 1944 could be used to sort out errors. I suggest that that is plain silly. Section 68 provides the ultimate sanction—reference of governors to the Secretary of State. We are not looking for something like section 68 of the 1944 Act. In this case, that

[Mr. McFall]

would be a sledgehammer to crack a nut. All we want is accurately audited reports, just as one expects in respect of financial matters.

The point about specifically audited reports and information is very important. The Government intend that information published by each school should be straightforward, factual and easily obtainable. This is referred to as raw data. However, at no time in the current debate has "raw data" been defined. If the Secretary of State persists with this, it will end up as a raw deal for schools and pupils.

Having looked through the literature on education, I should like to quote from *Education* magazine of September 1991. In an article, Gerald Smith, who is head of St. Peter's independent school, Northampton, asks:

"How, on a raw score league table, would you measure the achievement of one of the Chinese boys at our school, admitted from Hong Kong 18 months ago at the age of 14, unable to speak a word of English, who passed GCE art at grade A, mathematics and drama at grade C and who is now aiming, his confidence growing on success, to take five more next year?"

Gerald Smith goes on:

"On a league table this would appear as only three at grade C and above, yet this is as great an achievement as that of another boy who gained 10 GCSEs at grades A and B and four A-levels in chemistry, physics, biology and history, gaining him admittance to medical school. Both boys worked to their full capacity."

But the league tables do not show that both worked to their full capacity.

I have evidence from my region of Strathclyde, whose authority has undertaken a close examination of league tables. That authority says that the most potent factor affecting school performance is the intake of the school. This has been referred to by educationists as the "value added factor". It is very important that that factor be recognised.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) referred to Matthew Arnold. Perhaps we should reflect on what Matthew Arnold said. When he was inspecting schools, he would have concluded that one of the most harmful aspects of these proposals is that they could give rise to the emergence of a league table of schools based on assessment results, and that this could result in teachers developing a "teach the test" mentality. One American teacher I spoke to said that the test result followed the teacher like an albatross. More than 100 years ago Matthew Arnold, in his capacity as a schools inspector, described this phenomenon as

"a game of contrivance in which it is found possible by ingenious preparation to get children through the examination in reading, writing and ciphering without their knowing how to read, write and cipher."

While not questioning the integrity of the teaching profession, I must say that pressure will undoubtedly be put on teachers to adopt a narrower focus. League tables may improve test results, but they will be a backward step as regards the education of children. That is why new clause 7 is so important.

Mr. Fallon: It is a truism to say that we have had a wide-ranging debate, but we have ranged through the Principality of Wales, the kingdom of Scotland, the republic of Bermondsey perhaps, and certainly the local authority of Bolton.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who concentrated on new clause 7, which provides yet more evidence of the Opposition's schizophrenia to which I referred. On the one hand, they urge that the chief inspector should be independent of the Secretary of State, as was urged in the former debate. On the other, in the new clause, they want to turn the chief inspector into an agent of the Department of Education and Science.

The regulations to be made under clause 16 will be the responsibility of the Secretary of State, and it will be for his Department to ensure that they are satisfactorily complied with, as it does now for similar regulations under the Education Act 1980 and the Education Reform Act 1988. The means whereby the information received and published is to be checked and monitored is primarily a matter for statisticians and administrators to consider. We have no intention of using Her Majesty's inspectorate or the school inspection teams as a statistical enforcement agency in that respect, and I am surprised that it should be suggested.

If hon. Members are concerned lest the monitoring will not be strict enough, I can reassure them that we are determined that it will be. We have already considerable experience is arranging for the collection and publication of examination results in a format best designed to ensure that those of all schools are presented in a fair and comparable way. We shall be similarly scrupulous in dealing with school leavers' destination figures, truancy rates and, in due course, national curriculum assessement results.

One of the main purposes of the consultation exercise, which we are currently conducting on the arrangements for 1992, is to establish the fairest way of presenting the information school by school. We shall be consulting again—taking account of the experience this year—before bringing in regulations under this legislation in 1993.

Mr. Morgan: Does the Minister realise how the publication of league tables will work practically? Let me give him an example. In my constituency, there is a school with a serious truancy problem. It has decided to produce attendance sheets for every period because that will enable it to prevent people from wandering about the school and out of school. The truancy rates will give the school a high truancy figure, because the records will show not just who is there at 9 o'clock in the morning and 1 o'clock in the afternoon, but at other times.

The hon. Gentleman's ministerial colleagues have complimented the school on its initiative, but in a league table sense it would be cooking its own goose and putting itself at the bottom of the league by detecting additional truancy not detected by other schools which did not bother to keep similar records. If everything is covered by league table, that will kill any incentive to get to grips with serious truancy problems.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman seems to assume that finding other ways of identifying truancy makes it more difficult rather than less difficult to eradicate. I do not accept that. Of course there is a phenomenon known as post-registration truancy, whereby those registered at the start of the day may not be there at the end of the day. A school which adopts the policy described by the hon. Gentleman would be well placed to produce better figures.

The school's policy would show that it was tackling truancy seriously. I hope that pupils in that school would respond favourably.

Mr. McFall: I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) is trying to get a definition of truancy. What does truancy mean? Let us assume that, in a day with eight periods, a kid is absent for the middle of the day but was there in the morning and is back in the afternoon: is that truancy? It might be truancy in one school but not in another. The compilation of the figures will be important. If there is no definition of truancy and no standardisation, that will lead to inaccurate comparisons between schools. That is the important point. We want the Minister to turn his attention to standardisation.

Mr. Fallon: I am happy to assure the hon. Gentleman that I have indeed turned my attention to that. Just last year we reviewed the truancy regulations. They needed considerable updating. The main regulations dated from the 1950s. We have defined truancy much more strictly to show us who is absent on an unauthorised basis. To put it broadly, we have defined truancy as unauthorised absence. We have standardised the way in which unauthorised absence is to be recorded. If the hon. Gentleman has not seen the regulations or the guidance that went with them, I will be happy to send him a copy.

If Opposition Members wish to ensure that registered inspectors take full account of the performance information for each school which will be specified under clause 16, they need have no fears. HMI now has regard to such information in conducting school inspections, and I expect that HMCI's guidance will make reference to the need for inspection teams to do so.

It hardly needs to be said that if inspectors find evidence that a school is not meeting its statutory duty under clause 16, they can be expected to draw attention to that evidence in their report. HMCI will be able to notify the Secretary of State. But that will apply to all possible breaches of the law that might be uncovered, and I see no point in limiting such a duty to clause 16.

I now turn to the remarks of the hon. Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy). I begin by apologising to the House for the absence of my ministerial colleagues from the Welsh Office. As the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will recall, they were present yesterday. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office, sat patiently here waiting for the scheduled debate. If it had not been for the disgraceful antics of the Opposition, which led to the postponement of that debate, my right hon. Friend would have been here to respond to the points that have been raised.

I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Torfaen raised the points that he did on new clause 7. He had some rapid footwork to do. First, he had the nerve to go on about our failure to recognise the distinctive features of the education system in Wales.

Mr. Straw: That is absolutely right.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Member for Blackburn rather unwisely says that that is absolutely right. Perhaps I could refer him to his document "Raising the Standard". It did not include any reference to the proposal for an education standards commission in Wales which the Labour party has now rushed out. Perhaps he could explain to the House how Wales was forgotten for a few months until these new clauses were drafted.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): The Opposition take Wales for granted.

Mr. Fallon: As my hon. Friend rightly says, the Opposition take Wales for granted. The Government have recognised the distinctive features of the education system in Wales by creating a separate office of Her Majesty's chief inspector for Wales. Our announcement of the conclusion of our review of HMI yesterday again confirmed that the Conservative party has the true interests of Wales at heart.

As for the proposed educational standards commission, I need not repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said with regard to England about the imposition of an additional bureaucratic tier between HMI and the Secretary of State. HMI has enjoyed a great deal of independence, and we propose to give it more, not less, under the provisions of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Torfaen began by referring to criticism of the Government's proposals in Wales. I took a careful note of his words. He said that all those who knew anything about education in the Principality were opposed to the Government's proposals. He conveniently forgot the welcome given to the proposals by, among others, the Welsh Secondary Schools Association. I quote from the *Western Mail* for 8 January.

> "The shake-up of the school inspection system proposed by the Government was welcomed yesterday by the Welsh Secondary Schools Association.
>
> The plans . . . could herald a new, more productive era in schools, the WSSA said."

The WSSA is quoted as saying:

> "Parents are not gullible people. They know the strengths and weaknesses of a school and the inspection reports could be used to give a school direction."

9.15 pm

The Opposition really insult the integrity of school governors and the intelligence of parents by their suggestion of soft options. Our proposals are clearly set out in the Bill, and they will increase the frequency of inspections and reports to give parents and governors the information they need. They will do that in Wales, just as they do it in England.

The hon. Member made a point about the numbers in the Welsh inspectorate. The number of HMIs has varied in the past, and I have no doubt that it will vary in the future. There are 58 in post at present. Hon. Members will know that the structure in Wales is different from and on a much smaller scale than that in England. That point was made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan).

It is important that HMCI for Wales should have the staff that he needs to fulfil the function and responsibilities given to him under the Bill. It would be quite wrong to restrain HMCI for Wales's flexibility in this respect by stipulating numbers in primary legislation, as Opposition Members attempt to do in amendment No. 58, which, if we are fortunate, we may reach a little later.

My right hon. Friend's announcement yesterday of the outcome of our review of HMI in Wales, in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), said that, in due course, we expect to see an overall reduction in the numbers of HMI engaged

in work relating to schools. I do not intend to be drawn at this stage on precise numbers or on precise timing. I must emphasise that, even if any reduction in HMI numbers takes place, that should not be taken as any threat to HMCI's power or influence, which depends not on the number of people that he employs but rather on the new, independent framework that is being set up under the Bill.

I repeat that the independence of HMCI and his inspectorate has been strengthened under the Bill. The office of HMCI for Wales will be a new and separate Department of State, with clear statutory powers and duties. It is in our interest to ensure that HMIs are fully staffed to oversee the new system of regular inspections and to offer advice and assistance to my right hon. Friend. There is a new task for HMIs in the establishment and administration of the new scheme for registration and training of inspectors, whether from local authorities or from the private sector. The new inspectors will then undertake the regular inspection of schools proposed in the Bill.

Until such time as the new arrangements take effect, HMIs will continue their programme of inspection of schools. The registration and training of new inspectors will need to take account of aspects of the education scene in Wales which are different—notably, Welsh medium education and the teaching of the Welsh language, history and culture. We therefore need to give careful consideration to the question of numbers, and we intend to keep the situation under review in the light of these factors and the introduction of the new inspection arrangements. I am sure that HMCI will be as anxious as we are to ensure that HMIs in Wales will be sufficient in number to discharge their duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

Mr. Morgan: Can the hon. Gentleman define for the benefit of the House and the people of Wales what the phrase

"able to work in Wales"

means with respect to the definition given in the parliamentary reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) yesterday? Does it mean that inspectors from outside Wales will not be regarded as qualified? They are not my words; they are the words of the Secretary of State for Wales. What meaning are we expected to draw from that phrase?

Mr. Fallon: It will be for HMCI for Wales to determine the arrangements for those whom he will be registering as inspectors for Wales. He must decide whether they are fit and proper persons, properly trained and therefore able to work in Wales. That is a matter for him to determine. I would not want to debar an inspector from England who chose to move to Wales to inspect Welsh schools, provided that he satisfies the criteria in the guidelines laid down by the separate HMCI for Wales—that is the important safeguard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) offered to present a tea towel to my hon. Friend the Minister of State, who authorised me to thank him for that offer. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East mentioned advice. From the sum of money spent on inspection and advice by local education authorities, we are taking only half—roughly that sum spent on inspection. We are leaving a large sum of money through which—should they choose to do so and should their schools desire it—they may continue to offer the sort of advisory and support services that they have offered until now.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) suggested that he might like a tea towel too.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I have one.

Mr. Fallon: He has one—I think that we can judge that by his shirt. He then suggested that we should study clause 16, to strengthen appeal arrangements for city technology colleges. It is a little rich of hon. Members on the Liberal Democrat Bench—as they at first opposed the entire concept of CTCs—to come to the House now—

Mr. Hughes: No.

Mr. Fallon: Yes. If we look back at the proceedings on the Education Reform Act 1988—

Mr. Hughes: I oppposed it.

Mr. Fallon: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that he opposed the concept of CTCs. He now pops up as an advocate for the disappointed customers of CTCs and seeks to widen their access to them. I hope that that is a recognition—even if it is implicit—that CTCs have worked, have proved successful and are popular in his constituency. I do not think that he could have made that more explicit by the case that he is seeking to make.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Fallon: I am answering the question.

The hon. Gentleman asked my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to consider changing the arrangements only last Tuesday. I hope that he will accept that it is perhaps not as easy for us to change our policies in 48 hours as it is for some other parties. On Tuesday, my right hon. and learned Friend undertook to consider that matter, and I am happy to consider it further.

Mr. Hughes: Without entering into the wider argument, may I say that I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that the Bill may be a means of achieving the end. If that end is to be achieved, it needs to be sooner rather than later because of the timetable of the academic year.

Mr. Fallon: Fair enough.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West who seems to have left us temporarily, raised a number of matters. First, he referred to the Adams report and asked why it was not being published. All those hon. Members who have asked for its publication have correctly described it as an internal review, and it will stay internal.

The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for Cardif, West asked why the parliamentary question had been tabled relatively late in the life of the Bill. Proposals to introduce new inspection arrangements for schools were trailed in the citizens charter published last July, and in "Education: A Charter for Parents in Wales", published last September. Details of our proposals were set out in the Education (Schools) Bill, which was published on 7 November. I do not think that Opposition Members are seriously suggesting that they and the wider public in Wales have been unaware of the proposals, which have been extensively debated and publicised in the past few months.

Our proposals for new school inspection arrangements, the creation of the office of Her Majesty's chief inspector for Wales, and the role of HMI in those arrangements have been clear for a long time. Indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement was concerned as much with other aspects of the role and structure of HMI—for example, in respect of further education, initial teacher training, and advice and assistance to the Welsh Office education department.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West asked why we were not making similar changes to the inspectorate in Scotland. I have to inform him, as the hon. Member for Dumbarton could easily have done, that the parents charter for Scotland provides for a number of inspectorate changes in Scotland including the establishment of a audit unit. That is set out helpfully in the parents charter for Scotland document, which I shall ensure is distributed to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West and other hon. Members representing Wales who have not seen it.

I hope that that covers the main points raised in the debate and that I have shown that the new clause is not necessary for the reasons that I have given. I have endeavoured to answer all the questions.

Question put and negatived.

New clause 9

FINANCIAL REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

'Sections 1 to 15 of this Act shall not come into force until the Secretary of State has presented to Parliament a report giving details of the financial arrangements for the payment of registered inspectors and has given his certificate that he is satisfied that both the nature of those arrangements, and the adequacy of the funds available, is such as to ensure the efficient and proper conduct of inspections as provided for under section 9.'.—*[Ms. Armstrong.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this we may take new clause 16—*Resources*—

'. It shall be the general duty of the Chief Inspectors for England and Wales to identify the resource needs of the education system and advise their respective Secretaries of State accordingly and each Chief Inspector shall direct Her Majesty's Inspectors to ensure

(a) that inspection reports on individual schools contain information on the resources made available to each such school, and

(b) that such information is provided to parents under the terms of section 16 of this Act together with relevant information on the efficient management of financial resources by each such school.'.

No. 3, in clause 9, page 5, line 20, at end insert—

'(2A) The duty imposed by subsection (1) or (2) shall not apply unless the Chief Inspector states, in a report laid before Parliament, that he is satisfied that the number of inspectors registered under section 10(1), and the numbers of registered inspectors and members of inspection teams trained under paragraph 4 of Schedule 2, are sufficient for the purpose of carrying out the number of inspections prescribed under subsections (1) and (2) of this section.'.

No. 21, in clause 17, page 11, line 42, after 'children;', insert—

'(aa) assist parents in assessing the adequacy of the funding provided to schools maintained by their local authorities;'.

No. 8, in schedule 1, page 16, line 43, at end insert—

'*Estimate of expenses*

(4A). The Chief Inspector shall, before the end of the month of December in each year, lay before each House of Parliament a report setting out his estimate of the expenses that will be required, and the numbers of staff, appointed under paragraph 1 above, required, adequately to fulfil his duties under this Act in the next following financial year.'.

No. 9, in page 17, line 41, at end add—

'*Accounts*

10. (1) It shall be the duty of the Chief Inspector—

(a) to keep proper accounts and proper records in relation to the accounts;

(b) to prepare in respect of each financial year a statement of accounts in such form as the Secretary of State may direct with the approval of the Treasury; and

(c) to send copies of the statement to the Secretary of State and to the Comptroller and Auditor General before the end of the month of August next following the financial year to which the statement relates.

(2) The Comptroller and Auditor General shall examine, certify and report on each statement received by him in pursuance of this paragraph and shall lay copies of each statement and of his report before each House of Parliament.'.

Ms. Armstrong: I fear that this will be the last main debate on the Bill, which shows the double standards with which we are dealing this evening. The Government told us that the Bill was being curtailed because of a filibuster, but we have been running to deal with the debate so far and we shall not be able to deal adequately with this discussion in the short time that is left before the guillotine falls.

New clause 9 deals with what has become known as the West Sussex question, part of which deals with the amount of money available to schools to ensure that they can carry out adequate inspections. Those people who are seeking to make this ludicrous Bill work are seriously worried about whether there will be sufficient finance to ensure even the four-yearly inspections, let alone dealing with the West Sussex question, the issue of more regular inspections or a school needing further inspections within that four-year period. *[Interruption.]* What will the public think of the behaviour of some Conservative Members when we are talking about the money that will be made available for a privatised inspection service? That money will not be sufficient to guarantee four-yearly inspections and certainly not sufficient to guarantee additional inspections should they be needed.

We have heard from the National Association of Head Teachers that it feels that it is vital that the proposals of funding for schools to pay for the obligations introduced in the Bill should be discussed at length by the House. The association will be interested to learn that the guillotine motion means that we have less than 35 minutes to debate the issue. The NAHT says that it wants a guarantee in the Bill that there will be funding for schools to enable them to pay both for inspections and for the follow-up processes prescribed by the Bill. The new clause would ensure that sufficient finance was available.

The Government have given us some idea of what they think the finances will be and of what they have made available for the Bill. They estimated that the cost would be £70 million a year. For schools inspected on a four-yearly cycle, the cost is estimated to be £6,000 for a primary school and £30,000 for a large secondary school.

[Ms. Armstrong]

About 5,000 primary schools and 1,000 secondary schools will be inspected each year if all the schools are inspected on a four-yearly cycle.

There was a leak in *The Independent* of the report undertaken by HMI on the review of the inspectorate. I regret that that report has not been published, and it is not adequate for the Government continually to say that it is an internal review. They have published no independent information in support of the Bill, although it is only by being provided with such information that we can have a clue about how the Government have arrived at the costings that I outlined.

9.30 pm

The leaked report in *The Independent* on 14 November estimated the cost at £75 million a year and said that it would take probably the equivalent of 30 full-time person days to inspect each primary school and 73½ days to inspect each secondary school. It suggested that the going rate, as it were, would be about £250 a day. Some independent consultants who had seen themselves applying to set up teams of inspectors currently ask much more than £250 a day for their services, so many of them have been put off seeing privatised inspections as a new avenue of activity.

The cost of inspecting a primary school, based on those calculations, would be about £7,500 and not the £6,000 I estimated earlier. The estimated cost for a secondary school would be £18,000. That produces a total cost of £55·5 million for the annual inspection of schools, leaving a gap of £20 million. So we are left guessing to what the missing £20 million would be devoted.

A person who was thinking of setting up inspection teams wrote an amusing article in *Education* on 22 November last and went through what the costings would actually mean. He came to the conclusion that no inspection team would make a profit. We are talking of private companies which will have to pay for training and work over and above the work of inspection. The Minister said in Standing Committee that a team member could not expect to be on an inspection team all the time. Hence, the additional expenses for travel, office costs and so on will, I suggest, involve inspection teams in considerable overhead expenses.

We must remember that the cost of inspection will not comprise simply the cost of the team being in the school. To have a good inspection, time will have to be spent planning and the inspectors engaging in lengthy discussions about their collective experience in the school. Money will be spent on publishing the report and on marketing.

The firms in question will have to market their wares and publicise their areas of expertise and specialisms. As we know from the cost of Government spending in such areas, it is a rising and high cost. If it is expensive for the Government to advertise their wares, it will not be a cheap option for inspection teams to undertake a similar exercise. As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has pointed out, they will also be looking for a profit, for all sorts of other reasons.

The figures that we have been given simply do not add up. They do not suggest that schools will have enough money to carry out full inspections properly every four years. The Secretary of State says that the people of West Sussex should not worry, because the four-yearly inspections will be much more thorough and detailed than the current annual inspections: we have heard a good deal about that today. But the inspections will not be so thorough unless the Secretary of State ensures that enough money is available to pay for them.

If the information that we have received so far about the costs allocated by the Government is correct, there can be no guarantee that even the four-yearly inspections will be carried out properly. Certainly there is no guarantee that each school will be able to afford the range of people that will need to cover the whole curriculum, especially in the small primary schools.

In Committee, we spoke of the need for, say, someone with a knowledge of special needs to be involved in every inspection. We were told that it would naturally be deemed important for the whole range of the curriculum to be covered by the inspection team. Yet many small primary schools will be able to afford only the equivalent of a two-member inspection team, which will have to include someone who knows nothing about the subject. How, in those circumstances, will that school be able to afford a proper inspection team? It would probably be able to afford it for no longer than half a day.

The whole thing is ridiculous. The new clause would enable Her Majesty's chief inspector to say that not enough money was available, and that a report must be brought to Parliament assuring us that it was available. Ultimately, as we debate this squalid Bill, we must try to ensure that there is enough money to secure the efficient and proper conduct of inspections. At present, it is all up to the Secretary of State.

I wanted to deal with many more points that were made in Committee, but I realise that other hon. Members wish to speak. Let me simply say that I hope that the Minister will be serious about ensuring that there are enough funds not only for the four-yearly inspections, but to allow schools to arrange proper inspections in the interim if problems arise. Anything less will inevitably mean a fall in standards; and, inevitably, it will mean that hon. Members cannot be assured that proper and efficient inspection of schools will take place.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): The one thing on which the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) and most Conservative Members can agree is that we want the Bill to result in improved standards of inspection of our schools. The fact that the hon. Lady does not feel that the Bill will achieve that shows her complete lack of understanding of how it will work in practice. I can understand why she tabled the new clause, but the Bill defines statutorily, for the first time, the duties of the chief inspector. Clause 2(3)(c) says that his duties include:

"keeping under review the system of inspecting schools under section 9 . . . and, in particular, the standard of such inspections and of the reports made by registered inspectors".

Clause 4(a) also says that he has a duty to make an annual report on that to the Secretary of State, who will lay it before Parliament.

The more important way in which the Bill will make inspections rigorous, to a high quality and to a standard that can be afforded by schools is through a concept that Labour Members do not appear to understand—the concept of competition. That is the essence of the Bill. Governors have a responsibility to their school. They are given a certain allocation of money. As chairman of the finance committee of a large secondary school in

Birmingham, I would make sure that the amount of money that I had to spend on inspections was adequate, and that will happen in schools everywhere. Governors will not be looking at the financial side; they will be making sure that every inspection is comprehensive and rigorous. That is a responsibility for which they will have to answer to the parents of the children in their schools.

If that were not the case, high-spending authorities would have both higher standards of education—there is no evidence to support that proposition—and the best levels of inspection. My experience of Birmingham, which is not one of the lower spenders, is that its inspection system was not thought to be of a sufficient standard when I was on the education committee eight years ago. The reason for that was not how much money was spent but how it was organised and directed and on what the vast majority of time was spent.

If inspectors have to spend their time dealing with genderism, multi-culturalism and anti-racism, the authority will not have a comprehensive system of inspection of schools. Such a system is not a properly organised one. On the other hand, my present authority—Hereford and Worcester—which is one of the lower spenders, has a good system which is organised properly.

The responsibility for inspections will be at school level, and on a competitive basis, the incentive for high standards of inspection at a reasonable cost, within the figures given by the hon. Member for Durham, North-West, may well be possible and easily achieved under the Bill.

Mr. Enright: If those standards of inspection are so magnificent, why are the Government refusing to apply them to the private sector in which many people are being duped?

Mr. Coombs: The Bill deals with the public sector and the taxpayer's responsibility to the public, through the local education authority and governing bodies, to ensure high standards. Secondly, when someone sends his child to a private school, he makes a choice, exercised through his cash, or his own free will, and is entitled to take his child away if he feels that standards are not high enough. In the many cases where people do not have that choice, the Bill, which, for the first time, gives parents the information that they need to make choices, gives the Government the opportunity to ensure that schools are acting to an adequate standard.

If the Opposition understood the benefits of a competitive environment and the fact that local management of schools has already led to significantly increased resources for schools because local governing bodies know how to use them better than does a relatively remote local education authority, they would better understand the rationale behind the Bill and how it will provide better systems of education and inspection and, therefore, higher standards.

9.45 pm

Mr. Flannery: It saddens me to hear that an honourable person such as the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) believes in such nonsense—because that is what it is. It is unworkable.

I shall deal with the question of resources, which has hardly been mentioned. Clause 16 has the heading "Information about schools" and its title is "Power of Secretary of State to require information". On the question of information about schools, the Secretary of State can ask for all kinds of things, many of them reasonable, but the resources that schools need to carry out the plans are not mentioned at all.

Although tiny, the Bill will be to education what the poll tax was to taxation. It could linger but—God forbid—not for as long. It is as unworkable as the poll tax. We all remember that the right hon. Lady who used to lead the Conservative party boasted that the poll tax was the flagship. That flagship sunk, but not without trace. It will continue for another year at further expense, and we wonder what will happen.

It is no wonder that the Government do not mention resources, because resources are being handed out at such a petty level that every aspect of our lives is in confusion. Chaos prevails everywhere. In the education service the morale of our teaching force is at its lowest ebb. Many of us who are familiar with it can see that clearly, and everyone accepts that something must be done.

When we saw all the amendments that had been tabled in Committee we knew in advance what would happen. There were literally hundreds of amendments and the study of them was in itself a life study. One always knows when the Government are in grave difficulties with their plans. First, they rush them through at a pace which is wholly unacceptable, even to them. Because they rush them through—as they did with the Education Reform Act 1988—they amend them to such an extent that Bills emerge at twice their original length. The Government are so uncertain about the Bill that they constantly tabled amendments. Even tonight, no fewer than 34 amendments have been tabled by Conservative Members, never mind our amendments. Only their amendments would have been accepted if they had been debated. None of our amendments have been accepted.

The Minister of State looks surprised. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) would reach an agreement—we had to agree—saying, "If you leave this and don't vote on it, we shall attend to it on Report." Of course, we get nothing on Report, no matter what concessions we made. If the Minister does not agree, let him denounce what I have said and tell us how many amendments were accepted and how many he would have accepted tonight. In the meantime, resources, which are regularly overlooked, are not mentioned. At this stage, the debate on resources is one of the most important.

Schools are short of money now. They are low in morale, and short of books and equipment. Everywhere the fabric of the buildings is in a state which demands billions of pounds to put things right, yet we are enacting doctrinaire dogma, which says, "If it moves, privatise it; if it doesn't move, still privatise it. Privatise everything." The Government are caught up in their own dogma, so it was inevitable that the marketplace would prevail in education, and we would have all this unworkable nonsense.

In new clause 16, an important new clause which the Government will not accept, we try to put things right. It tries to remedy the deficiencies in the Bill concerning the money that schools urgently need for the inspections that are supposed to be carried out. Many of us hope that we shall never see those inspections, because the Opposition will become the Government, and we shall get rid of this nasty, squalid little Bill straight away.

New clause 16 says:

[Mr. Flannery]

" . It shall be the general duty of the Chief Inspectors for England and Wales to identify the resource needs of the education system and advise their respective Secretaries of State accordingly and each Chief Inspector shall direct Her Majesty's Inspectors to ensure

(a) that inspection reports on individual schools contain information on the resources made available to each school, and

(b) that such information is provided to parents under the terms of section 16 of this Act together with relevant information on the efficient management of financial resources by each such school."

The Government will never accept the new clause, because the money they give schools is totally insufficient to run the schools as they are now. Schools are all short of money. Anybody who goes into schools sees that they need paint, equipment and everything else conducive to good education. Yet they cannot get that now. They have to beg for it and pray for it, and it is never forthcoming.

Yet at the same time, vast amounts of money are being given to the rich. The people in charge of the denationalised industries, such as British Telecom, are handing out hundreds of thousands of pounds to themselves, in the middle of a great recession, and there is no competition, although the Government talk about it. The situation is the same in the water industry, and now it will be the same in education. Money is to be made out of education.

In Committee the question whether inspection should include reference to the resourcing of education was left open. The Minister of State said:

"We are talking about whether inspectors should be able to report on how resources affect the quality and standards of education"—

as though resources did not affect the quality and standard of education. In order to rebuff us and justify doing nothing about the issue, he continued:

"the quality and standards of education that are delivered either nationally or in schools. We believe that there is nothing in the Bill's drafting to prevent them from doing that."

We replied, "All right then, put it in the Bill. Why can we not have it in the record that resources should play a role, that the inspectorate should tell the chief inspector nationally what money schools have available and, if they were to carry out inspections, how much more they would need?" We did not get that into the Bill. The Minister said that of course the Government would do that. Nonsense. Of course they will not.

The Minister continued:

"Indeed, I shall go further and say that we would anticipate that both nationally and locally they would do that if they felt that it was a germane factor."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 3 December 1991; c. 122.]

He was wondering whether resources in schools and the need for money and equipment were a germane factor. Who does he think he is talking to? I cannot imagine a situation in which resourcing was not a germane factor. However, I can imagine what a vastly reduced HMI might do. The inspectorate will be reduced to a pitiful number, and the inspectors will not be independent. They will be tied to the Minister, and the Minister knows that.

I envisage the possibility that a vastly reduced HMI or new privatised inspection team will not always provide such information unless it is required of them. The chief inspectors should have particular regard to policies on resourcing and appraisal and should maintain the widely accepted need for the inspection service to retain the integrity of independence. That deeply worries us, because all the signs are of a semi-dictatorial approach to the inspectorate, curbing the inspectors and bringing in people who are totally unqualified.

For instance, the Bill says that at least one member of a team should have no knowledge of education, in the sense of having had contact with it as a governor or in a similar role. There is no evidence to say that only one member of a team should have no educational knowledge, and the Bill gives the impression that there will be more than one such team member. Such a person could, for example, be a butcher. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) pointed out, in a jocular bit of repartee, that the schools will canvass the teams, and cheaper teams will be offered. Those teams will be compliant to the schools and will give a good report in order to get the job next time. The marketplace will then have entered the classroom. If that is the achievement in education that the Conservative party seeks, it is welcome to it.

The Bill is an attack on our schools, not on the schools to which Conservative Members' children go. Even the so-called great Education Reform Act 1988 applies not to their schools but only to ours. Neither does the national curriculum apply to their schools. We shall make the national curriculum apply to their schools and shall have their schools properly inspected by our inspectors.

The Government conceded to the inclusion in the publication of schools' information of a reference to managing finances efficiently. The Minister of State said in Committee:

"There is a case for at least giving the Secretary of State the power to require schools to publish what I should call financial efficiency data at some stage in the future. We have no immediate plans to do so, but it makes eminent sense to have that power on the statute book." —[*Official Report, Standing Committee F,* 14 January 1992; c. 434.]

We have asked the Minister to put that in this squalid little Bill. But the Bill must go to the House of Lords, and I shall be staggered if it passes through there without much discussion. In Committee, the Minister of State said that he would "expect and want" inspectors to report on how the available resources affect both quality and standards in schools, locally and nationally. He added that Her Majesty's chief inspector's annual report already deals with resources. He argued against specific wording in the Bill, saying that many other issues to be considered by inspectors would have to be added to the Bill. There are 34 more in the Bill and the Minister says that the Government would have to add more.

The Government were in such a mess with the Education Reform Bill that it emerged approximately twice as big as it started, as a result of long amendments not from the Opposition but from the Government. They are in the same mess in this run-up to the general election which they are about to lose.

The new clause deals with the Minister's concerns by ensuring that the information is included in every inspection report. We want the resources—or lack of resources—to be shown in every report so that people and parents know how little money the Government are providing. They do not want that information in the Bill because they know that they are under-resourcing education. Under the Bill, they will continue to under-resource education, so they do not want to touch on the question of resources.

The new clause will ensure that the information is included, thereby providing a ready source of information for HMI to use, without having to investigate many issues at once. We have no faith in the belief that that inspectorate will be in a position to do a proper job. It is liable to be ill-qualified. It is liable to be, as state education is for our children, on the cheap all the time.

In conclusion, because it is nearly time for the guillotine to fall—although I am more than willing to keep going, as I have a lot to say yet—the new clause goes further in establishing the rights of parents to know the level of resourcing for each school. With their new-found desire to give parents full knowledge of everything, it should be perfectly obvious to the Tories that, if there is one thing above all that parents would like to know, it is whether their school is under-resourced. If their children's school is half falling down, for instance, the inspector will make it clear. An independent inspectorate will tell the truth, as it has done all these years.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order this day, put the Question already proposed from the Chair,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 137, Noes 269.

Division No. 63] **[10 pm**

AYES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Couchman, James
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkhope, Timothy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Paisley, Rev Ian
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooney, Terence
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher

Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. SPEAKER *then, pursuant to the Order, put the Question,* That all remaining amendments standing in the name of a member of the Government be made to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 270, Noes 134.

Division No. 64] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert

Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Paisley, Rev Ian
Primarolo, Dawn
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooney, Terence
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 9

INSPECTION OF CERTAIN SCHOOLS

Amendments made: No. 22, in page 5, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) maintained nursery schools.'.

No. 23, in page 5, leave out line 32.

No. 24, in page 5, line 45, at end insert—

'( ) Regulations under this section may, in particular—

(a) make provision as to the period within which the first inspection of a school under this section is to begin;

(b) make any such provision by reference to the time when funds for the first inspection are made available to the school; and

(c) provide for intervals to be prescribed by reference to times when funds for inspections under this section are made available to schools.'.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Clause 16

POWER OF SECRETARY OF STATE TO REQUIRE INFORMATION

Amendments made: No. 25, in page 10, line 6, leave out second 'of'.

No. 26, in page 10, line 12, leave out 'and'.

No. 27, in page 10, line 15, at end insert

'; or

(c) assist in assessing the degree of efficiency with which the financial resources of those schools are managed.'.

No. 28, in page 11, line 15, at end add—

'( ) This section does not apply to nursery schools.'.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Clause 17

INFORMATION AS TO SCHOOLS AND PUPILS: SCOTLAND

Amendments made: No. 29, in page 11, line 35, leave out second 'of'.

No. 48, in page 11, line 42, leave out 'and'.

No. 49, in page 11, line 46, at end insert

'; or

(c) assist in assessing the degree of efficiency with which the financial resources of those schools are managed.'.

No. 50, in page 12, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) This section does not apply to nursery schools.'.

No. 51, in page 13, line 6, leave out 'or' and insert 'school, an'.

No. 52, in page 13, line 6, at end insert 'or a nursery school.'.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Clause 18

INTERPRETATION

Amendments made: No. 30, in page 13, line 30, leave out from 'arts"' to 'section' and insert

'have the meanings given in'.

No. 31, in page 13, line 38, after first 'school', insert 'maintained nursery school'.

No. 32, in page 13, line 38, at end insert—

'"nursery school" has the meaning given in section 9(4) of the Education Act 1944;'.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Clauses 20

EXPENSE

Amendment made: No. 33, in page 14, line 30, at end insert—

'( ) There shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund any sums received by the Chief Inspector under section 10(4)(b) or paragraph 4(3), 5(3) or 12(4) of Schedule 2."—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Clause 21

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT, EXTENT ETC

Amendments made: No. 34, in page 14, line 32, leave out from 'Act' to 'as' in line 33 and insert 'shall be included among the Acts which may be cited'.

No. 35, in page 15, line 1, leave out from '(6)' to 'also' in line 3 and insert

'Paragraphs 7 to 9 of Schedule 1 and paragraphs 2 and 3 of Schedule 4'.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

Second Schedule—

SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

Amendments made: No. 36, in page 18, line 33, at end insert ', any connection with—'.

No. 37, in page 18, leave out line 34 and insert—

'(a) the school in question,'.

No. 38, in page 18, line 35, leave out 'any connection with'.

No. 39, in page 18, line 35, after 'person', insert 'who is'.

No. 40, in page 18, line 35, at end insert—

'( ) any person who is a member of the school's governing body, or

( ) the proprietor of the school,'.

No. 41, in page 20, line 10, after 'body', insert '(if any)'.

No. 42, in page 20, line 12, at end insert—

'( ) In the case of—

(a) a voluntary school, or

(b) a grant-maintained school which was a voluntary school immediately before it became a grant-maintained school,

the registered inspector shall also send a copy of the report and summary to the person who appoints the school's foundation governors.'.

No. 43, in page 20, line 36, after 'this' insert 'Part of this'.

No. 44, in page 20, line 46, after 'body', insert '(if any)'.

No. 45, in page 20, line 48, at end insert—

'( ) In the case of—

(a) a voluntary school, or

(b) a grant-maintained school which was a voluntary school immediately before it became a grant-maintained school,

the appropriate authority shall also send a copy of the action plan to the person who appoints the school's foundation governors.'.

No. 46, in page 21, line 17, leave out 'school' and insert 'maintained school which is not a nursery school'.

No. 47, in page 22, line 38, at end insert—

'Additional action plans

.—(1) The governing body to whom an inspector has reported under this Part of this Schedule shall, before the end of the prescribed period, prepare a written statement ("the additional action plan") of the action which they propose to take in the light of his report and the period within which they propose to take it.

(2) Where an additional action plan has been prepared by a governing body, they shall, before the end of the prescribed period, send copies of it to the person who appoints the school's foundation governors and—

(a) in the case of a voluntary school, to the local education authority, or

(b) in the case of a grant-maintained school, to the Secretary of State,

and to such other persons (if any), in such circumstances, as may be prescribed.

(3) The governing body shall—

(a) make any additional action plan prepared by them available for inspection by members of the public, at such times and at such a place as may be reasonable;

(b) provide a copy of the plan, free of charge or in prescribed cases on payment of the prescribed fee, to any person who asks for one; and

(c) take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that every parent of a registered pupil at the

school for whom the school provides denominational education receives a copy of the plan as soon as is reasonably practicable.

(4) Where the governing body of a school have prepared an additional action plan, they shall include in their governors' report a statement of the extent to which the proposals set out in the plan have been carried into effect.

(5) In sub-paragraph (4) "the governors' report" means—

(a) in the case of a voluntary school, the report referred to in section 30 of the Education (No.2) Act 1986; and

(b) in the case of a grant-maintained school, the report referred to in section 58(5)(j) of the Education Reform Act 1988.

(6) Sub-paragraph (4) applies only in relation to the most recent additional action plan for the school in question.'.—*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke.]*

MR. SPEAKER *then, pursuant to the Order, put the remaining Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 132.

Division No. 65] **[10.22 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Sir Anthony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Rt Hon Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, Sir John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sainsbury, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Squire, Robin
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, Sir D. *(Calder Vly)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Darling, Alistair
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Paisley, Rev Ian
Primarolo, Dawn
Redmond, Martin
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooney, Terence
Sedgemore, Brian
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Eric Illsley.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

PETITION

Standing Charges

10.40 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I beg to ask leave to present a petition containing 10,000 names of my constituents. The subject matter of the petition is standing charges, which the pensioners of my area say are a great burden on them. Many of them, especially during the winter period, are terrified of the cost that those charges impose on them. In addition, they find it difficult to accept the need for standing charges when massive increases have been imposed by services such as gas, water and electricity and when, at the same time, huge salary increases have been given to the directors of the companies that provide those services.

The petition also refers to the issue of free TV licences, of which I am a fervent supporter. Indeed, I find it incredible that at this time, as we head towards a general election, Conservative Members should be calling for a cut of 1p in the pound——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member must not indulge in that type of party political onslaught when presenting a petition.

Mr. Meale: I understand, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps I might comment that it would cost only 0·3p for every disabled person and pensioner in Britain to be given a free TV licence. The petition reads:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of residents of Mansfield showeth that standing charges for water, gas, electricity and telephones are a great burden on pensioners at a time when the profits of the utility companies are high and the salaries of the top executives have been vastly increased.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will introduce legislation to abolish standing charges for these utilities for all pensioners, and also to introduce free television licences for pensioner households.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray."

To lie upon the Table.

Black Country Spine Road

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10.42 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring before the House the problems that the proposed black country spine road will cause my constituency of West Bromwich, East and the constituency which is represented with such distinction by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromwich, West (Miss Boothroyd), who regrettably, for understandable reasons, cannot be here tonight.

The original black country spine road proposals were to link junction 1 on the M5 at West Bromwich to junction 10 on the M6 near Wolverhampton and to open up considerable areas of the black country for regeneration. The road, which was to be dual carriageway, with grade-separation at all junctions, passed through the boroughs of Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Those authorities have, since 1988, been working with the Department of Transport and the Black Country development corporation to design and construct the road.

The speed with which the design of the scheme progressed to the compulsory purchase order stage was unprecedented and a public inquiry was held in September 1989. Indeed, since then, a dozen or so houses on Billhay street in West Bromwich have already been acquired and stand derelict, although I understand that they will not now be required, given the truncated version of the scheme.

In May 1990, the Department of Transport embarked on a review of the black country spine road following an escalation of the estimated costs of the original scheme. On 18 July 1991, in a written reply, somewhat surprisingly to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan), the Government announced that they could not support the full scheme as proposed. They were willing, they said, to support an at-grade dual carriageway running from Carters green, West Bromwich, to Leabrook road, Wednesbury, at an estimated cost of £93 million. The northern section of the scheme would not be supported.

I said that I was surprised that the decision has been announced in the form of a written reply to the hon. Member for Yardley. That reply came within a few days of a letter that I had written to the Minister for Roads and Traffic, asking what progress was being made on the scheme. It is rather sad that the present Government are so partisan that even a road scheme in my constituency, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West can be announced only through the medium of what I regard as a planted question from a Conservative Member. I do not really see the point of subterfuge.

The current proposals are as follows. The road is now to be built from Carters green, in the West Bromwich, East constituency, to Leabrook road, Wednesbury, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West. As I have said, there are now no proposals to build the northern section through Walsall and Wolverhampton. The road will be built as a dual carriageway with at-grade junctions, at an estimated cost of £93 million. It will not be trunked on completion. As far as we know, the project will be managed by the Black Country development corporation, with Sandwell metropolitan borough council as the agent.

The objectives of the original proposals have not altered from its inception, and were comprehensively addressed in the evidence given to the public inquiry. The present proposals fall far short of the objectives, as I shall attempt to show. The objectives of the original scheme were set out by the Black Country development corporation in 1988, as follows:

"To promote a high quality dual carriageway through the Black Country as an extension to the national and regional network . . . To provide access to land for regeneration purposes . . . To provide overall relief to existing routes and accident blackspots . . . To create jobs, both directly and indirectly . . . To reclaim land, both directly and indirectly."

I have mentioned some of the shortcomings of the current proposals. The strategic nature of the road link, as forming part of the national and regional highway network, will be seriously affected. Traffic relief to existing routes, as originally envisaged, will be considerably diminished. The regeneration role of the new road will not be fully met, because of the more limited junction capacity and the exclusion of the northern half of the scheme.

The reduced scheme will mean that some of the existing highway network will be used for quicker alternative routes. Particular traffic problems will occur at the A41/A46 junction between Holyhead road and High Bullen, Wednesbury, and the A461 Wood Green road to junction 9 of the M6. Deletion of grade separation at All Saints junction means that that point will be overloaded immediately after the spine road is opened. In a moment, I shall try to show just how overloaded the road is at that point now.

The development of the Patent Shaft site in Wednesbury, and the reclamation and development of other sites along the route, will be hampered by the reduced scheme, which will obviously be much less attractive to developers. The exclusion of the route to the north will have a similar damaging impact on job creation.

The Government continually lecture us about the need to save money. Any proposals from the Opposition are greeted with the parrot cry, "Where will the money come from?" It is interesting to note that this aborted scheme has already cost about £15 million—according to the local authority estimates—and there are further costs of house acquisition and so forth still to be calculated.

When the original proposals were first published, I campaigned on behalf of my constituents for proper grade separation at the two junctions in my constituency—one at the expressway with All Saints way, and also at the end of the expressway at Carters green in the centre of West Bromwich. As for the first junction, there is already a considerable problem with traffic tailback at the expressway, particularly in the evening rush hour. The extra traffic that will be generated by the new road proposals will not only cause chaos at this point; it will mean considerable environmental damage and pollution for the residents of All Saints way, Grafton street and surrounding areas. The additional traffic will also have an environmental and health impact on the children and staff at Cronehills school, which is adjacent to the junction X.

I should not have to remind the Minister, but I do, of the already high levels of pollution caused by motor vehicle exhausts in Birmingham and the black country generally. I also remind him that one regularly reads of people committing suicide by inhaling car fumes, and this

[Mr. Peter Snape]

scheme will result in thousands of extra vehicles standing in traffic jams and polluting the atmosphere next to a major primary school in my constituency, and a school in the constituency of my hon. Friend.

The proposals at the next junction along are just as damaging, if that is possible. Instead of the two existing roundabouts in the Carters green area of West Bromwich, there will be one massive roundabout, with a cris-cross system of subways through which local residents from Old Meetings street, Garratt street and the Tantany area of West Bromwich will have to scurry to get to and from the town centre. I can describe these proposals only as a mugger's paradise. I ask the Minister to remember what it was like to use subways in the days before he acquired his ministerial limousine. Does he seriously think that the people of West Bromwich, particularly women and school children, and especially at night, will be happy to be treated like moles while motor vehicles remain on the surface, just so that a few pounds can be saved?

My opposition to the scheme is based on the fact that, once again, a great deal of money, around £93 million, is being spent on what I and my hon. Friend can describe only as a road to nowhere, to which must be added the minimum of £15 million for house purchase and other acquisitions.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: No, I will not. The hon. Lady knows the tradition with Adjournment debates. Had she told me that she wished to participate, I would have made allowances for that. Furthermore, the scheme does not affect her constituency.

This scheme has come from a Department that has so far refused to give the go-ahead for worthwhile public transport schemes, such as the Midland metro. Virtually all of line 1 of the metro could be built for the same cost as these disastrous proposals, and if the Minister is really anxious to relieve congestion in West Bromwich and the surrounding areas, his Department can give the go-ahead for loan sanction for the Snowhill-West Bromwich-Smethwick rail line opening. Those two projects are environmentally acceptable, and will be much better value for money than this scheme.

I have mentioned the impact of this scheme on the environment. Does the Minister intend to see that an environmental impact assessment is carried out before work starts? I remind him that the United Kingdom is a signatory to EC directive 85/337 of 28 June 1985, and annex 1 of that directive says that all motorway and dual carriageways must be subjected to an environmental impact assessment. I have today written to Commissioner Ripa de Meana to ask whether he has been notified as to whether such an assessment has been, or is being, carried out by the Government and, if not, whether he will ensure that this environmentally disastrous project is properly evaluated before the go-ahead is given.

The original spine road was worth doing only in its entirety, with underpasses at the two junctions that I have mentioned, terminating at the junction with the proposed black country route, connecting with the M6 at junction 10. This half-baked and disastrous alternative is not worth doing, and the Government should put up the money for the original scheme or divert scarce resources to the other economical and environmentally acceptable alternatives that I have outlined.

I ask the Minister to look again at this scheme. There has been considerable local opposition to these proposals in both the West Bromwich constituencies. Terminating the route at the Patent Shaft site will divert thousands of extra vehicles along Wood Green road in Wednesbury, in my hon. Friend's constituency. Already, a new entrance and exit, to the new Ikea furniture showroom next to the motorway, has been opened in that road, and if the steel terminals in the west midlands are combined in Bescot sidings, it is intended to build another carriageway into Bescot sidings.

Not surprisingly, my hon. Friend has asked me to point out that the residents of Wood Green road feel that what was a comparatively tranquil town road is being turned into a major highway against their wishes and, indeed, without their views being heard.

If the Minister is serious about alleviating congestion and about regenerating the black country, he will carry out the scheme properly. I appeal to him even at this late stage to think again, because what he proposes is not merely expensive but environmentally disastrous.

10.54 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I have listened with interest to the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), having read some of the advance local press comments which anticipated the debate. Those comments highlighted the fact that he was going to say that the spine road—the £93 million scheme—should be abandoned and that the money should be spent on other transport infrastructure projects.

Apparently, the hon. Gentleman did not mention to the press the fact that he wanted to spend not £93 million but more than £250 million on the road. He also emphasised to the press the fact that he thought that the Black Country development corporation, which has done so much to revive spirits in the black country, should be closed as soon as there was a Labour Government. Of course, that means that it will never be closed, but it was an amazing example of the hon. Gentleman making Opposition policy on the hoof. If there was to be a policy to close any development corporation, one would have expected it to be announced by an environment spokesman rather than by a Front-Bench transport spokesman.

It appears that the hon. Gentleman's position on this project has much to do with his embarrassment about the fact that, as a transport spokesman of a party committed to reducing investment in roads, he should be arguing the logic of attaching to the road a cost of more than £250 million rather than £93 million. As a result of the logic of his party's position, he is forced to say that it would be better to abandon the scheme altogether rather than to proceed with the two and half miles of road which has the support of industrialists, the chambers of commerce and many people in the black country. His comments in recent weeks were designed—at least, this was their effect—to undermine confidence in the project, although, now that it has become clear that the Government will be re-elected, that confidence will return.

Mrs. Hicks: I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister has been so perceptive. That will be welcomed by the majority of business men in the west midlands and by

the majority of the colleagues of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). There seems to be tremendous confusion and conflict which my hon. Friend has picked up. I draw his attention to the fact that some Labour Members of Parliament and Labour councillors have supported the road—we have seen headlines such as

"Labour in protest at spine road cutback"

and

"New bid to save Spine Road".

Those Labour Members and councillors share my bitter disappointment that the Government could not allocate the funds for the complete road.

Having expressed my disappointment to my hon. Friend so clearly on many occasions, I invite the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East—if he is as united with his colleagues as he appears to believe—to join me in pressing the Government to say that, as soon as finance can be made available, we shall continue the regeneration of the black country and complete the road. He appears to be taking a mealy-mouthed attitude and saying, "Let's back down."

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but she should direct her remarks to the Minister.

Mr. Chope: I accept that my hon. Friend has been commendably consistent in her support for the black country spine road. She is right to draw the House's attention to the inconsistency in the hon. Gentleman's attitude. If he wants a longer and more expensive road, he should have the courage of his convictions and should argue for it openly, saying that it would be his party's policy to spend more than £250 million on it. Instead, he is saying that that would not be his party's policy—his party's policy would be to abandon the scheme. That displays a rather bizarre sense of reasoning, and I am sure that the people who depend upon the benefits brought by thhe revival of the black country for their future employment will find it bizarre, too.

The black country was intensively developed by extractive and manufacturing industries for more than a century. Over the past 20 years, it has suffered from the decline of its traditional engineering trades, but the resilience of the area and its people has seen its fortunes gradually improve through the 1980s. In order to give the core of the area a major boost on the path back to prosperity, the Government set up the Black Country development corporation in 1987. The corporation's principal aims are to encourage new economic initiatives, to foster innovation and to facilitate regeneration.

Right from the start, the development corporation recognised that the building of a new spine road through the area was crucial to the success of its strategy for regeneration as a means of opening up the area and securing better access to the national road network. Consultants looked at various options and identified a feasible route. That would be a 4·5 mile long dual carriageway road linking the black country route—and thence junction 10 of the M6—with junction 1 of the M5. At that stage, the estimated cost was £50 million. On that basis, in early 1988 the Government agreed to provide 100 per cent. funding. The scheme was to be promoted jointly by Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton metropolitan borough councils.

The three local authorities, working together with the Department and the development corporation, made quick progress. Within 18 months, planning permission had been obtained and highways orders made in time for a public inquiry to be set up in September 1989. By that time, however, it was already apparent that the costs of the scheme were escalating alarmingly, and the review of the project was carried out.

As a result of the review it became clear that the scheme in its original form, far from costing £50 million, would cost between £245 million and £290 million—a staggering amount for a mere 4·5 miles of new road. So, although the Government were very much aware of the importance of the spine road to the regeneration of the black country, it was clear that substantial savings would have to be made to enable the road to be built within the time scale required for the delivery of the development corporation"s programme.

The outcome is that the road will run for about 2·5 miles, and will thereby serve the largest single development site in the development corporation's area. It will provide access to more than 500 acres of redundant and derelict land. Apart from the significant environmental improvement that that will represent, there will be major development and employment benefits for the black country as a whole.

The new road will still be built to dual carriageway standard, with at-grade junctions, at an estimated cost of £93 million. At £36 million per mile, the scheme is still expensive, although it represents a worthwhile investment.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East has complaints about individual aspects of the design of the road, which is now subject to consultation on the basis of a planning application. He is aware that there is still scope for detailed revisions to the design, and I hope that what he has said about the impact on his constituents of certain aspects of the design can be accommodated as far as possible by the developers.

However, the fundamental issue whether it is wise to build the road is at the heart of the hon. Gentleman's argument. My view and that of the Government—and that of almost everybody in the black country, including the development corporation, the chambers of commerce, and businesses in the area—is that it is much better for the black country to have the spine road as proposed than to have no spine road at all.

That is why I am sure that people will come out in droves to support the Government's policy when they have the opportunity later this year.

Mr. Snape: When the Minister said that people would come out in their droves, I presume that he was referring to the forthcoming general election. Is he interested in the fact that people came out in their droves in West Bromwich and Wednesbury to express their unanimous opposition to the present proposals?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks) says that that is not the case. The information before me shows that there is substantial support for the scheme. As with every road scheme, some people who live close to the proposed route make detailed observations and representations.

If the Black Country development corporation, which is at the heart of the project and which has promoted it so effectively, were to be closed down, as the hon. Gentleman says a Labour Government would do, the consequences would be dramatic for the black country. Future Government investment of £109 million would be lost in

[Mr. Chope]

the next three years, and substantial further investment beyond that would also be lost. Some 1,200 acres of developable land could not be developed. The corporate plan, which includes proposals for the development of some 10 million sq ft of industrial and commercial floor space, could not be realised. Some 3,000 houses in the corporate plan would not be built, and some 18,000 new jobs that would be generated under the corporate plan would not be generated. Furthermore, some £780 million of private investment resulting from the development corporation's work would not take place. That is dramatic stuff.

The other day, Labour Front-Bench spokesmen were in Birmingham saying that they favoured a west midlands regional development corporation. Why did not they take the opportunity to announce that their policy was to close down the Black Country development corporation, which offers so much prospect of improving employment opportunities, investment and regeneration in the black country?

The Government have committed themselves to improving the black country, and I have pleasure in commending our policy to the House. Although the hon. Gentleman may be concerned about the detail of the road, in substance he is wrong to suggest that it would be better for the black country to have no road at all than to have this £93 million road.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 31 January 1992

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Mifegyne

9.34 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I wish to present a petition, which reads as follows:

To the Honourable the Commons of Great Britain, Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The humble petition of the Ealing Chapter of Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International.

The petition is in the name of John K. Winget, of 25 Conway crescent, Perivale, Greenford, Middlesex, and others. It

Showeth

That we the undersigned wish to note with regret that the Abortion Pill Mifegyne (known as "RU486") has been granted a product licence. We believe that drugs and medicines should be used only to save life. We deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn human beings, and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically.

I support and associate myself strongly with the petitioners.

The petition ends:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of Mifegyne (known as RU486) and any other drugs which, like it, are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life. And your Petitioners, as in duty bound will ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc. Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I imagine that I am not the first hon. Member to be faced with a dilemma on learning, with a mixture of pleasure and trepidation, that he has won a high place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. Should one propose a controversial measure that is likely to attract publicity but will have little chance of ultimate success; or should one introduce a modest Bill with some value, unlikely to make front-page headlines but with a reasonable prospect of reaching the statute book? It was obvious to me that, given that little of the parliamentary Session remained, I should choose the latter course, and I had little difficulty in deciding to introduce a Bill to allow a nurse prescribing.

We are all familiar with the respective roles of doctors and nurses. Doctors diagnose complaints and propose treatment, usually involving drugs. They may see the patient from time to time thereafter, but the responsibility for supervision of the patient and the administration of treatment lies with the nurse, who will see the patient far more frequently. That applies particularly when the patient is being treated at home—in the community—rather than in hospital.

Clearly, in some circumstances, when a nurse sees the need for drugs and dressings to be applied, it would be an advantage for her—or possibly him—to be able to issue a prescription without having to trouble the doctor, who will certainly have full confidence in the nurse. The case is particularly strong when the patient needs perfectly straightforward medication or dressings which can be bought over the counter but to which the patient will be entitled free of charge if he has a prescription.

It is not difficult to imagine the frustration that is experienced by a district nurse who makes a regular visit to a patient and finds that that patient needs further supplies of a medicinal product or dressings. The nurse will have to return to the surgery, interrupt the doctor to get a prescription signed, and then go back to the patient to hand over the prescription.

The concept of nurse prescribing is not new. In 1986, the then DHSS commissioned a review chaired by Mrs. Julia Cumberlege on community nursing. Its report was entitled "Neighbourhood Nursing—a Focus for Care". I apologise to the House for the length of the quotation that I am about to give, but it is very much at the core of the issue that we are discussing. Under the heading "Power to Prescribe", the report said:

"We found district nurses waste time in requesting prescriptions from general practitioners for such things as dressings, ointments and medical sprays—those for leg ulcers, for example. In addition, many nurses have become very skilled in managing pain relief programmes for terminally ill patients. We believe therefore that community nurses who work with terminally ill patients should be permitted to use their professional judgment on matters such as the timing and dosage of drugs prescribed for pain relief. We recommend that the DHSS should agree a limited list of items and simple

[Mr. Roger Sims]

agents which may be prescribed by nurses as part of a nursing care programme, and issue guidelines to enable nurses to control drug dosage in well-defined circumstances. Detailed medical protocols should be drawn up with general practitioners which encourage community nurses within strictly agreed limits to vary the timing and dosage and use of alternative pain relief agents for patients who have been diagnosed by general practitioners as terminally ill and in pain. This may require nurses carrying on their own small supply of drugs, as midwives do now."

Its views were supported by a 1987 report of the Social Services Select Committee. Based on the evidence that it received, it recommended that

"the Government introduce legislation to permit nurses with appropriate training limited powers to prescribe and in defined circumstances to modify dosage."

In the same year, the Government's primary care White Paper said that representatives of the professions would be consulted. Paragraph 7.13 said:

"The Government also sees merit in giving nurses more freedom to prescribe a limited range of items (such as dressings, ointments or medical sprays) and to exercise their professional judgment in relation to the timing and dosage of drugs prescribed by doctors for pain relief. To some extent this development is already taking place. The Government will consult the Professional Standing Advisory Committees about the professional and ethical issues of prescribing by nurses with a view to producing appropriate guidance."

The Government then set up the advisory group on nurse prescribing under Dr. June Crown. Its terms of reference were to make recommendations on the circumstances in which nurses might prescribe, the categories of items to be covered and methods of prescribing them, the circumstances in which nurses might vary the timing and doses of drugs prescribed by doctors, the implications for nurse training and the resource implications.

The advisory's group's report was published on 20 December 1989. It comprises a detailed analysis of what might be involved in the proposal. I quote simply from some of its core recommendations, one of which was that

"suitably qualified nurses working in the community . . . should be able, in clearly defined circumstances, to prescribe from a limited list of items and to adjust the timing and dosage of medicines within a set protocol."

It suggested that

"Nurses with a district nurse or health visitor qualification (including those employed as paediatric community nurses, practice nurses or private nurses . . .) having had the additional necessary training: should be empowered to prescribe items necessary for the care of patients with those conditions for which the nurse takes independent clinical responsibility; should be able to supply certain categories of patients with items within a group protocol and adjust the timing and dosage of medicines within a patient-specific protocol."

My hon. Friend the Minister indicated general acceptance of the report's recommendations and that work and consultation on it would proceed.

Almost a year ago to the day, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) introduced his Nurse Prescribing Bill under the ten-minute rule. Shortly afterwards, the Minister announced that a cost-benefit analysis was being commissioned. That did not happen until April, when Touche Ross was asked to assess the cost and benefits of nurse prescribing. No doubt my hon. Friend's Bill was talked out because that analysis had only just been put in hand.

It seemed to me that this was an admirable measure for the Government to introduce, particularly in a short parliamentary Session. I suggested that course to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and was encouraged by his comments at the Royal College of Nursing congress in May and at the Conservative party conference at Blackpool in October, when he expressed his general support for the concept.

I was rather surprised, therefore, that such a measure was not included in the Queen's Speech. I know that the Royal College of Nursing and other professional bodies were disappointed by that omission. When I drew third place in the ballot for private Members' Bills, my choice of Bill seemed obvious.

Fortunately, my success coincided with the publication of the Touche Ross report—a formidable document which gives a most detailed analysis of the costs and benefits. I do not think that I would endear myself to the House if I went into them. There are obvious difficulties in making precise assessments of costs and savings when one is faced with a range of variables such as to what extent giving nurses the right to prescribe will lead to more prescriptions. It is difficult to translate savings in time and greater convenience into cash terms. Perhaps I could quote from part of the conclusions at paragraph 5.4:

"We conclude that the nominal value of time saved and the gross costs of nurse prescribing are relatively close before allowance is made for benefits not evaluated in this study, namely"—

these seem very important benefits—

"faster treatment, at times, for patients, benefits from additional items prescribed and increased job satisfaction for nurses."

The publication of the Touche Ross report appeared to remove the only remaining ground on which the Government might prefer to defer action. Once I had persuaded the Department of Health that I was anxious to proceed with the Bill, it offered complete co-operation. I should like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister for Health and her officials for their help in introducing the Bill, to the Royal College of Nursing for its persistent and effective campaigning, briefing and help in publicising the Bill, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington for blazing the parliamentary trail. I am happy that he is a sponsor of the Bill, and I hope that he will speak later in the debate.

The Bill is brief and simply amends existing legislation. Clause 1 brings nurses, midwives and health visitors into the category of "appropriate practitioners" for prescribing purposes and gives the Minister the power to specify, by regulation, categories of nurses who may prescribe and the qualifications and training that they would need. Clause 2 makes it legal for dispensers to dispense prescriptions written by such authorised nurses. Clauses 3 and 4 merely make similar provision for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I emphasise the fact that if the Bill becomes law there is no question of nurses in general immediately being able to prescribe. The Minister would have the power, which she does not have at present, to make regulations to turn the principle of nurse prescribing into practice. Of course, the cynic might think that that means that once the Bill has been passed nothing more needs to be done. I assure the House that that is not so.

Discussions have been taking place for some time about the formulary covering the range of drugs which nurses would be allowed to prescribe, although that is likely to be relatively small because the majority of items that nurses will want and need to prescribe are those which can be purchased over the counter, and various forms of

dressings. Discussions are also in hand about the training and the qualifications needed, and work is being done to set up the appropriate training courses.

The report to which I referred suggested that people with district nurse and health visitor qualifications should be authorised to prescribe. If that happens, it will apply to about 28,000 district nurses and health visitors who are serving the community. Their ability to prescribe will clearly save time, avoid troubling doctors, save patients' and carers' time and will generally be more convenient. The measure will be especially beneficial to the elderly, to the disabled being cared for at home, to diabetics and to the terminally ill. The Bill has been welcomed on an individual and an organisational basis by nurses, by general practitioners and by patient organisations.

As I have said, it is merely an enabling measure. Once it reaches the statute book it would be up to the Secretary of State—not to me—to take further steps because he will have the regulation-making powers. I need hardly say that I shall be keeping an eagle eye on my hon. Friend the Minister, although I suspect that by then it may be her successor, as she is destined for higher things. However, I shall be pressing the occupant of that office for action if it proves necessary to do so.

I know that nurses in particular are anxious to see the intentions of the Bill translated into action. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us more about the preparatory work in hand and give some idea of the timetable that she envisages for the Bill's implementation, when the regulations are likely to be laid, when training will start and when the first batch of authorised nurses will be able to exercise their right to prescribe.

I understand that the likelihood is that initially only nurses with district nurse and health visitor qualifications are likely to be involved. I should mention the fact that I have received representations from practice nurses suggesting that they should also be included. If they have the qualifications to which I referred they would in any event be included in, as it were, the first batch of qualifiers, but perhaps the Minister will confirm that some thought could be given in due course to extending the authorisation to practice nurses. I want to make it clear—and perhaps the Minister will confirm this—that there is no question of extending prescribing rights to hospital nurses in general. That is clearly not necessary, because doctors are invariably on site.

Of course, there will be costs involved in the implementation of the Bill and perhaps the Minister will say how she envisages that they will be met. I presume that her Department will meet the training costs, but as to the costs incurred in the prescribing operation, where nurses are attached to a fund-holding practice I imagine that those costs will be charged against the practice's budget, and I hope that that will be taken into account when the budgets are fixed. Otherwise it would seem appropriate that the costs should be met either by the health authority or—more likely—by the local family health service authority.

This is a simple Bill which will benefit many of our fellow citizens. It will ease the burden on hard-pressed general practitioners, will facilitate the work of the unsung heroines of our communities—the district nurses and health visitors—and will improve the treatment of their patients, among whom any of us might find himself numbered in the fullness of time.

I mentioned the fact that the Bill started with the report of a body chaired by Mrs. Julia Cumberlege. The House will be aware that she is now Baroness Cumberlege, and I am happy that she is standing by, ready to sponsor the Bill should it find its way—as I hope that it will—to another place. Therefore, I hope that the Bill will receive the House's support and that its progress will be facilitated so that it may pass into my noble Friend's hands in another place and reach the statute book before it is overtaken by events.

9.56 am

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on choosing this subject for his private Member's Bill. He said that he had faced a dilemma about whether to choose a Bill that would make the headlines or one that would be passed. I am sure that the 7 million or so patients who will benefit from nurses being able to prescribe will be grateful that he has chosen a Bill which will certainly be passed and will certainly—once it has reached the statute book and is implemented—have practical benefits for that many patients.

The Bill will also help district nurses and health visitors. They do not want to waste their time going backwards and forwards to the general practitioner's surgery. The hon. Gentleman rightly said that it is a waste of the doctor's time for him to turn his attention to something that has already been decided by someone else and merely to rubberstamp it. Such a situation also undermines the role of district nurses and health visitors if they have to go through that procedure when they know that they should be able to take the responsibility. The Bill has the confidence of GPs and will suit patients.

The hon. Member for Chislehurst can be certain that the Bill has the Opposition's support. It is important but not controversial. Everyone agrees that it makes sense and that it is a long-overdue reform. I do not want to concentrate on procedural matters, but, as the hon. Gentleman said, it is curious that the Bill has not been introduced by the Government, especially as the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill has just completed its Committee stage. It would have made sense for the Government to include this measure in that Bill so that it could be dealt with at the same time. Having publicly committed themselves to extending legislation to protect residents in small private residential care homes, the Government left it to a Back-Bench Member to bring in a Bill, and they have done the same thing again. Having said that this is not the procedure by which such a measure should reach the statute book, I welcome the Bill because it will result in a long-overdue reform.

I wish to raise three issues that are part of the backdrop to the Bill. The first is training, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The second is retaining those district nurses and health visitors who, as a result of the Bill, will be better trained, more skilled and more useful. We need to keep them within the national health service work force and to make better use of their additional skills. The third is the question of nurse prescribing in community care.

I am simply flagging those issues; I do not want to go into them in great detail. The Bill has the support of the Government and both sides of the House. It is uncontroversial. I should be sorry if the debate on the Bill

[Ms. Harriet Harman]

were to be unnecessarily prolonged and so prevented the House from debating the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill that hon. Members are waiting to discuss.

The issue of training was partly dealt with in the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill. The training of nurses to prescribe will be vital if the service is to be as widely available as we want it to be and if it is genuinely to benefit patients. However, there are problems with post-basic education. Training for nurse prescribing is likely to be at post-basic level. Although there is usually an incentive to safeguard funding for pre-registration education to maintain the supply of nurses coming into the NHS, the incentives for post-basic education are less secure.

The Royal College of Nursing has expressed its particular concern that trust employers might offer a poor deal to nurses who want to undertake training courses. The RCN suggests that nurses in trusts who want to undertake post-basic training are being required to transfer to fixed-term training contracts, with no guarantee of employment on completion of training. We do not want any disincentives in the system that would prevent people doing post-basic training and becoming nurse prescribers. Can the Minister assure us that training for nurse prescribing will be provided and that it will be accessible to those nurses who need it?

I wish briefly to deal with two other issues, but we shall explore them further in Committee. We need to retain trained staff. Prescribing will be carried out by specially trained and experienced nurses, yet trained nurses are leaving the NHS at the rate of 80,000 a year—a quarter of all nurses. That is bad enough for nurses with the basic qualification, but it will be an absolute waste of training and experience if we do not retain within the NHS those who are qualified to be nurse prescribers.

So far, the Government have made a large number of verbal commitments to creating the terms and conditions of employment that would enable women to stay in the work force and not give up when they have families. However, at district health authority and hospital level there have not been the practical measures needed to achieve that. That is why the figures for nurses leaving the NHS remain so bad.

It all comes down to practical implementation of flexible working hours and job sharing, so that women working in the nursing profession do not have to follow male patterns of employment, where eventually they find that combining family responsibility with work is simply too difficult, and they leave. That point applies to nurses at the basic level, but it is even more important when they become a more valuable resource after their post-basic education has given them the ability to prescribe.

Community care is also an issue. Nurse prescribing should be an important component of care for those who have long-term continuing needs, but are living in the community. I want community care to be properly implemented and funded, with nurses prescribing as a part of their work in the care of people living at home.

Nurse prescribing will happen, and I hope that it does so promptly. I hope that the Minister gives the assurances about timing asked for by the hon. Member for Chislehurst. The Bill will work better if it is implemented properly, if there is access to training for all who want it, if there are flexible patterns of employment to enable nurses to stay in the work force following post-basic training and if community care—where they will be doing their work—is implemented and fully funded. I hope that the Minister will also assure us on those points.

Once again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Chislehurst on choosing this subject for his Bill. He will not hit the headlines, but he will receive the gratitude of patients and nurses. We welcome the Bill.

10.5 am

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Like the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on his good fortune in winning a high place in the ballot. I am delighted that he has chosen to introduce a Bill on nurse prescribing and I am honoured to be associated with it as one of its sponsors.

As my hon. Friend said, the Bill deals primarily with the delivery of health care in the community. As presently envisaged, it has little relevance to medical practice in hospitals. However, I wish to put down a marker that, as the provisions of the Bill succeed in care in the community —for health visitors and community nurses—I hope that the possibility of its being extended to certain aspects of hospital work will be considered. Both I and my hon. Friend have received representations from the Southampton eye hospital, suggesting that there might be a case for extending the provisions of the Bill to ophthalmic casualty.

I shall not develop that point today, because it is not immediately relevant; I am simply putting down a marker that, as the Bill's provisions succeed in the community, we should not exclude an extension into other areas. As the Bill is drafted, such an extension would be possible at a subsequent stage through the Minister of the day introducing the necessary order.

My hon. Friend quoted from the Cumberlege report in support of his proposition that there should be a limited extension of prescribing from doctors to nurses. The report of my hon. and noble Friend Lady Cumberlege has clearly impressed my hon. Friend. It equally impressed those who served on the old Select Committee on Social Services. Paragraph 61 of the Select Committee report succinctly encapsulates all the arguments for the immediate move proposed by my hon. Friend. It states:

"The CNR team, and many witnesses believe that nurses should have freedom to prescribe a limited range of items, such as dressings, ointment and medical sprays".

I pause here to point out that items such as dressings are available on prescription. Hon. Members can buy them over the counter in a chemist's shop. It continues:

"and that they should be able to use their professional judgment on matters such as the timing and dosage of drugs prescribed by doctors for pain relief."

Pain relief is greatly important to many people. Our experience of people in that condition is that they are not in a steady state so, rightly, the prescription must be altered almost day by day according to the pain of the patient. It continues:

"Both suggestions have merit; to some extent they reflect developments which are already happening, for example in the care of the terminally ill where many nurses have special expertise. It is obviously wasteful nonsense for a district nurse needing a new dressing for a patient to have to return to the surgery, tell the doctor what is needed, possibly even draft the

prescription for him, get the prescription dispensed by a pharmacist and then make a second visit to the patient to apply the dressing."

Those last few words describe the present position. I am sure that all would agree that it is nonsense and that there must be a simpler way. My hon. Friend's Bill would provide that simpler way. Our report continued:

"We recommend that the Government introduce legislation to permit nurses with appropriate training limited powers to prescribe and in defined circumstances to modify dosage."

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will forgive me if I say that the Treasury, as always, seems to have made rather heavy weather of this matter. What are the extra costs of nurse prescribing? The truth is that nobody knows —and in so far as there will be an extra cost, that cost shows an unfulfilled need.

That is the story of the resource implications of care in the community. One factor after another shows unfulfilled needs. As we become more successful in delivering health care in the community, we discover things that we should have been doing in the past but have not done. Now that those things are identified, we do them and—surprise, surprise—it costs more. I ask the Treasury to be relaxed about that.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Does my hon. Friend agree that in practice, costs may be reduced? Nurse prescribing will save the waste of time that he has described when district nurses have to go backwards and forwards to doctors, and will allow them to give their time to more beneficial activities, rather than wasting petrol on such journeys.

Sir David Price: My hon. Friend has made an excellent point, succinctly put, which has not yet been fully recognised by the Treasury.

The Touche Ross report had to be completed in a considerable hurry, for reasons that we understand. Let us not attach too much weight to it, because the overall response rate from the 18 district health authorities surveyed was 15 per cent. of district nurses and 23 per cent. of health visitors. That sort of return is even lower than those used by political pollsters.

All that we know is that nurse prescribing will cost a bit more in medication. The extra costs will be those for the extra prescriptions generated; we cannot say more than that. It is not possible to put a figure on the costs. However, I am delighted that the Government are giving my hon. Friend a money resolution—that is all very proper—but I beg the House not to be too concerned about what the figure is. Let us recognise that there is a figure and settle for that.

I warn the House—I am afraid that I have been an awful bore in continually pointing this out—that, as we extend the concept of health care out into the community, we shall find more and more unsatisfied demands that have not previously been recognised. I hope that in so far as we are achieving a consensus on care in the community, there is a general recognition that it will cost more and use more resources.

I shall say nothing more about the financial side. The Touche Ross report had one or two nice things to say about the advantages of nurse prescribing. Under the heading, "Other Benefits"—uncosted—it said:

"The further benefits from Nurse Prescribing are the benefits to patients of faster access to some prescription items and the benefits they will derive from additional items prescribed for them by District Nurses and Health Visitors."

That sentence encapsulates one of the obvious advantages that will accrue from the Bill.

I am sure that both sides of the House will welcome my hon. Friend's Bill. In modern jargon, it is a patient-friendly Bill, and as such, it will appeal to both sides of the House.

10.13 am

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on deciding to promote the Bill. It is important, because, as the hon. Member said, there have been earlier opportunities for such legislation—the Government could have chosen to include a measure in their order of business, and a private Member once introduced a Bill, but unfortunately did not have enough time to secure its progress. I believe that the Bill will make headline news, because millions of people will benefit from it and they will see the advantages to them. So, although the hon. Member for Chislehurst feels that he may not achieve headlines in the newspapers, I feel that he will.

The hon. Gentleman has the opportunity of warning us all not to speak for too long, because another important measure, concerning the civil rights of disabled people, is to come before the House today. I hope that we shall be able to ensure that both these important measures make progress.

In principle, the Liberal Democrats support the Bill because it puts patients first; it brings their needs and concerns to the fore. It is so important that the person nearest to the patient should have the right to prescribe that I am sure the measure will receive all-party support.

We are told that there are 28,000 qualified district nurses and health visitors. With so many people who may eventually receive the training to prescribe, we can imagine the advantages that patients will derive from that training and delivery.

Such a measure has taken a long time to appear. I wonder why. The Government have had opportunities, but have not taken them. Nevertheless, the Bill will form an important part of the full delivery of their policy of care in the community. We shall not see real care in the community without nurses being able to prescribe drugs at the point at which they are needed.

We have an aging population and a growing number of residential care homes in the private, voluntary and statutory sectors. It is important that the health visitors and nurses who go to those homes can meet the needs that they find there. If we support care in the community we must realise that nurse prescribing is part of that and will help to make it work. That is why I was especially pleased to hear that the Government are prepared to allocate the necessary funds. If they did not, the costs would fall elsewhere—or the job would not be done.

Elderly people and chronically sick people in residential and nursing homes will not be the only ones to benefit. People in the community will benefit, too. I know from my work with homeless families that such people invariably need help late at night, in the early hours of the morning or at weekends, when it is especially difficult to find a general practitioner who will respond quickly to a call to

[Mr. David Bellotti]

see someone who has arrived on the doorstep—in my case that means the doorstep of the YMCAs for which I worked.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I accept what the hon. Gentleman says about the homeless, but does he agree that we should not be in danger of slighting the work of many general practitioners in inner cities where there are many transient homeless people? To give those GPs credit, working with family health authorities they have developed specialisations in dealing with the needs of transient people.

Mr. Bellotti: I agree that some of the work of GPs is outstanding in such areas, but they are greatly overburdened and have considerable calls on their time. Those of us who have worked with homeless families have found that many hours can pass between the telephone call and the arrival of a general practitioner. In recent years that situation has grown worse. Many of our GPs now have technology in their surgeries whereby calls are transferred to other doctors in the area. One tends not to know the GP who turns up, whereas one always knows the local health visitors and community nurses. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point, but he should also consider what I have said.

Terminally ill patients would also benefit. Not long ago I had the opportunity to visit St. Wilfrids hospice in Eastbourne, where wonderful work is done. That is true of hospices in every constituency. The hospice movement is wonderful, caring for people in their last weeks, days and hours. In those circumstances prescribing can relieve an enormous amount of pain, but it needs to be done very quickly. The Bill will help enormously there, and the people in Eastbourne certainly support that aspect of it.

In rural areas, the time taken by the GP to travel or the time taken by a family friend to go to the surgery to obtain a prescription can be considerable. Through the Bill, we seek to achieve the relief of pain for patients at the earliest opportunity. The Bill will be especially appreciated in rural areas.

I warmly commend the Bill and I congratulate the hon. Member for Chislehurst on introducing it. It has all-party support, so I hope that hon. Members will have the opportunity of saying a few words on it and of making progress on the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.20 am

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): It is a pleasant and unusual experience to speak in a health debate in which we are united. Not even the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) has said a word against the Bill, which is supported not only by the Government, but by the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, general practitioners, pharmacists and many charities. I join in congratulating my hon. Friends the Members for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who set the ball rolling, on their collective good judgment and common sense in introducing such legislation.

We should also congratulate Christine Hancock, the general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing. Even my hon. Friend the Minister must accept that Christine Hancock has always criticised the Government constructively. She, with her members, has shown much support for reforms such as the NHS trusts and GP fund holding. I also congratulate the chief nursing officer, Dame Anne Poole, who, sadly, will be retiring in a few weeks' time. All involved in health would wish to express thanks for what she has done for the Department of Health and for nursing. We shall all miss her and we send every good wish for the future to her successor.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who will, sadly, be leaving the House in a few weeks' time, made a masterly speech in which he summed up the position perfectly. I am not sure how one persuades the Treasury to be relaxed about anything, but the fact that the Government have tabled a money resolution is encouraging.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) made an especially good point about the time that is wasted at present. From briefings that I have seen, it seems that 1·2 million hours of nursing time are lost. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) said, there will be benefits for the terminally ill and for the elderly.

Mr. Stern: Although it is unfashionable in this debate, I will say a word on behalf of the Treasury. My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) will have noticed that, although the Touche Ross report accepts the principle that the Bill would help to save a great deal of time by reducing the hours that nurses, especially district nurses, spend travelling backwards and forwards, the monetary savings would be almost insignificant. Inevitably and rightly, the nurses, who are full-time employees, would use the time in other ways, to the great benefit of patients.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend is right; he speaks with his usual sagacity. He is an accountant, but I do not hold that against him.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) is wrong. Health authorities will be able to make choices. As we shall save nurses' time, we can either give the nurses more productive work to do or reduce the number of nurses and spend the money saved on other health care procedures or drugs. The options would be wider and I do not think that the Treasury should be quite so restrictive.

Mr. Hayes: I do not want to sound too much like a Liberal Democrat, especially before a general election, but I must say that I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Wanstead and Woodford and for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) at the same time. We shall utilise nurses' time and there will be savings, although there is a row over how great the savings will be.

The Government and the whole House accept the crucial role that nurses play in the health care team. It is significant that, since 1979, the three aims of Trevor Clay, the then general secretary of the Royal College of Nursing, have been achieved. First, he wanted an independent review body system for pay, and we have that. Secondly, he wanted the modernisation of the nurses' career structure, and we have that. Thirdly, he wanted a modern training system, which nurses will receive under Project 2000. The hon. member for Peckham mentioned Project 2000, and I will say a few words on it.

Project 2000 gives more weight to the process of learning and less to sharing the work load in hospital wards. That has been welcomed by nurses. Trainees will have student status and 62 per cent. of colleges in England have now converted to the system. Some £109 million has been spent in the past three financial years, and another £98 million has been allocated for 1992-93.

The trouble with nurse training, as the Government and the Royal College of Nursing accept, is that the training and education programmes have a high degree of rostered service which is not conducive to the learning process. All that will be changed. The education changes should go a long way towards providing a future nursing work force who are better equipped to meet the complex demands of modern health care, and who will have more interesting and satisfying careers.

For the first time, nurses will have a broadly based education which emphasises health promotion as well as the care of the sick. It will enable them to work either in hospitals or in the community without the need for extensive further training. I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh. When the regulations are introduced, we should look again at the hospital sector. I suspect that nurses are very much like sergeants and sergeant-majors in the Army. They tend to hold the hands—I do not mean that literally—of young doctors in training and they know far more about diagnosis and about prescription than do many of the young men and women who have just entered the medical profession. Nurses should have an even more professional role in prescribing in hospitals, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that point carefully.

There will be a better alignment of the practical and theoretical components of nurse training so that the practical component, which will not diminish significantly, will reflect the theoretical stage reached. There will also be an opportunity to rationalise the confused pattern of post-basic training, thus eliminating duplication and overlap. Provided that we can encourage as many nurses as possible to come in, the end result should be more flexible and adaptable practitioners who can respond to changes in the provision of service. I hope that the whole House recognises that.

I am sure that nurses will take into account the fact that their pay has increased substantially—I know that some would say not substantially enough—by 48 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79. Since that time the number of nurses has increased by 69,000, despite the difficulties in recruitment, which are being overcome. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister accepts that this Government are very pro nurses. We have embraced the majority of sensible suggestions proposed by the Royal College of Nursing.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention to the Government's record in improving nurses' pay. Would it be introducing an unduly controversial note to point out that, under the Labour Government, from 1974 to 1979 nurses' pay was cut by 3 per cent. in real terms?

Mr. Hayes: I wholeheartedly disagree with my hon. Friend. Nurses' pay was not cut by 3 per cent. in real terms. In the five years to 1979, the Labour Government cut nurses' pay by 21 per cent. in real terms—even if the overall figure was 3 per cent. Nurses should be aware of that. I do not want to introduce a party political note, given the unified stance that we have achieved on the Bill, but I had hoped that the hon. Member for Peckham would say that what she said last year and the year before about indicative budgets was totally wrong. I remember all the scare stories—how the elderly, sick and vulnerable would not get their drugs from the doctors. That has not happened at all.

Ms. Harman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I shall give way to the hon. Lady so that she can set the record straight and so that we can have a full televised apology.

Ms. Harman: I came to the House this morning warmly to welcome the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), which has all-party support. I hope that, in addition to securing the Bill's passage through the House today, we shall proceed to debate the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—a measure which profoundly affects many of our constituents. I shall not be rising to party political provocation and I am confident that the Minister will not either, so I suggest that the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) addresses himself to the Bill and does not try unsuccessfully to waylay and mislead the House so that we cannot proceed to the next item of important business. Shame on him!

Mr. Hayes: I apologise profusely for giving in to temptations of the flesh. The hon. Lady referred to the next Bill on the list which I wholeheartedly support—as, I suspect, do the majority of hon. Members present. That will be debated at another time.

I ask the Minister to consider the question of head lice—not a pleasant topic for a Friday morning. At the moment, we are in difficulty because parents do not like to think that their children have head lice, but they do have head lice. The presence of head lice does not mean that a child is dirty: they are often to be found on very clean children. Head lice are a taboo subject in many areas.

As a result of a change in the regulations, district health authorities cannot supply schools with the prescribed shampoo. My hon. Friend the Minister will no doubt point out that one can still get the shampoo free, but parents will still have to go to the chemist and ask for it, or go to their GP. They will find that extremely embarrassing because everyone knows what the shampoo is for.

I have received a number of letters on the subject. I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to comment today, but would ask her to re-examine the regulations and consider carefully allowing district authorities to prescribe to schools the shampoo that is needed to eradicate head lice. There is quite a lot of feeling on the subject.

Another matter relating to drugs on which I do not expect an immediate response from my hon. Friend the Minister is generic prescribing.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend has suggested quite an extension of the idea of nurse prescribing for individual patients—nurse prescribing for entire schools. I should have thought that that would be better handled by a doctor, if by anyone.

Mr. Hayes: I honestly do not care who handles it as long as it is handled in such a way as to spare many of my constituents the embarrassment of asking for head lice shampoo publicly—a matter on which they feel very

[Mr. Hayes]

strongly. This may not be a subject which ought to be considered on the present Bill, but I ask my hon. Friend to think carefully about it.

I shall refer briefly to the great potential savings from generics on GP prescription. About £50 million could be saved if GPs were given the opportunity to tick a little box on their prescription forms, with the consent of the patient, to indicate that, when the drug was dispensed, its generic equivalent could be given. I understand that the matter has been carefully researched and that £50 million-plus could be saved and ploughed back into the health service.

I warmly welcome the Bill. I wholeheartedly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst and ask that the Bill be put on the statute book as soon as possible—taking into account the general election. I hope that both Houses will be wholeheartedly committed to rushing it through, because it is needed.

10.35 am

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): I do not intend to detain the House. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on his excellent Bill. It is a commonsense measure. There is no reason why nurses, with all their practice and training, should not be permitted to prescribe to some limited extent. As we have heard, the measure is supported by the Royal College of Nursing, and I look forward to the time when nurses can, indeed, prescribe. It will help them; it will help patients; and it will help to take a little of the burden from doctors.

I want to make a plea for the continuing expansion of the categories of people who can prescribe and suggest that we draw pharmacists into that widening network. Increasingly, people go to the pharmacist when they have some minor problem and pharmacists are becoming the centre of attention for those who do not want to bother their doctors with petty complaints. At the moment, people have to go to the doctor's surgery to get a prescription. Then they have to take it to the pharmacist to get whatever medicine has been prescribed.

There is a bit of a problem, however, and the process can be obstructed if someone living on his own is so ill that he cannot get to his doctor. What can he do? He can ring up the doctor and say, "I am ill." The doctor may know something about his condition and may agree to let him have a prescription. If he is too ill to go to get the prescription, he has to ring friends or relatives to ask them to collect it for him from the doctor, to go to the pharmacist and to bring him the medicine.

I suggest that pharmacists have a valuable role to play. There may be a pharmacist just down the road from where the patient lives and if there were a little more co-operation, perhaps sick people who could not collect medicines themselves could have them delivered to their doorsteps.

The Bill will be of particular value in rural areas where there is rather a waste of petrol as cars rush back and forth. Nurses visiting patients have to return to the doctor's surgery for a prescription, then get the medicine and take it back to the patient. Nurses who visit patients regularly may know their needs better than the doctor does. If the nurses can say what the patient needs and prescribe that item, it will be much better for the patient.

I was sorry to hear the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) bringing in a note of complaint. She said that the Bill could have been tacked on to the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill. I have a copy of that Bill and it is clear that there is no way that the present measure could have been tacked onto it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst has introduced a welcome measure, which has the wholehearted support of the Government and of hon. Members on both sides of the House. We look forward to its becoming law.

10.38 am

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): It is no coincidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) should have introduced the Bill. He is a wise man who has long been interested in all aspects of the medical services, and was a sponsor of the idential Bill which I introduced in the previous Session. I am pleased to be a sponsor of the present Bill and to assist in my hon. Friend's far more successful attempt. I think that I can say that I support every word of the Bill, because it is almost word-for-word the Bill that I introduced last year.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Health, who is present in the Chamber today, is the very same charming Minister who killed the Bill then. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) from the Whips Office, although less charming, is from the same Whips Office that used the mechanics necessary to ensure that the Bill did not proceed. I recall being ticked off for writing a letter to *The Times* which advocated nurse prescribing and which pushed the Government in that direction. All that is now water under the bridge. I am delighted that we are all on the same side and that the Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc. Bill will make it to the statute book.

If primary legislation is to have distinction and life—and so much does not—it must be rested upon an idea or principle. This short Bill has a principle attached to it—the principle of liberalisation. That principle is the belief that the more responsibility we give to people, the more welcome it will be. Indeed, these new responsibilities are welcomed by the nurses. The more we can peel back layers of the onion skin of bureaucracy—in this case the bureaucracy of health care—the better society will be. That principle gives the Bill life.

That principle first caught the attention of Mr. Samuel Brittan, the economics writer for the *Financial Times*. He, perhaps more than anyone, even in this place, has pursued the concept of liberalisation over the past decade. He wrote a column in the *Financial Times* last year supporting the prescribing Bill and it was no conincidence that he entitled the column:

"A Modest Blow for Freedom."

That, of course, is just what the Bill is. It is modest and it is certainly a blow for freedom. It will free up the system.

Sam Brittan got to the core of what is interesting about the Bill when he wrote:

"The main thrust of economic liberalism is to remove unnecessary restrictions and barriers; and there is no reason for health to be exempt . . . Liberalism is concerned with putting the onus of proof on those who want to restrict.

There are many cases in which there are genuine costs of deregulation to be weighed up against the benefits. Here is a rare case where there seem only benefits."

I wholly agree. That is why the Bill should make progress.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst has spelt out clearly that the Bill will allow 25,000 community nurses—those with the highest training—to write prescriptions against a limited formula agreed in advance by the British Medical Association and the Government, we should push this a little further. We must consider the ideas put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price). In time, some hospitals may seek to have this liberalising measure applied in their wards.

There is an interesting precedent here in that midwives can alter the amount of painkillers, without recourse to a doctor's permission, in hospital, during childbirth. They have done that for years with tremendous skill and without anyone taking any notice or believing that that was a new measure. In time, I hope that we will look to an expansion of the measure to hospital nurses so that they can write their own prescriptions.

Mr. Arbuthnot: With regard to expanding the measure to hospital nurses, will my hon. Friend consider a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) who said that the proposal would not be necessary in hospitals because of the constant presence of doctors in hospitals? The Bill deals with an area where nurse prescribing is necesssary.

Mr. Fishburn: The point is that if it is not necessary, it will not happen. If it is necessary or desired, in a liberal society, it should happen. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh made that point.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) referred to the advantages of the Bill in a rural setting where community nurses have to travel great distances. I believe that the Bill will be equally welcomed in an urban setting like my constituency of Kensington. Picking one's way through the urban jungle can be every bit as time-consuming for a community nurse as travelling over the rustic downs of Sussex.

A community nurse in an urban setting experiences an enormous waste of time. She may finally arrive to see a bed-ridden patient in a tower block only to find that a bandage, lotion or painkiller is required, but she must return to base, to her GP's office, to get a prescription. That could easily take an hour or even the better part of an afternoon. That is extremely frustrating for the nurse and worrying for the patient.

I want to question my hon. Friend the Minister on a point which will be important as the legislation makes progress. Will practice nurses be able to prescribe? As I understand it, if a practice nurse has the qualifications of a district or community nurse, she will be able to prescribe. The thrust of this Government, through GP fund holding and the reforms of the past few years, has been to allow family health practitioners to have within their boundaries a range of health provision that brings care as close as possible to the patient.

GPs across the country have increasingly recruited practice nurses and the Government have rightly supported that. It would be a great shame if, as the Bill makes progress, it was not made clear that practice nurses could, particularly if a GP so wished, write prescriptions.

I have four children under the age of 10. When I am not in the House, I spend most of my time in the doctor's surgery. One of my children has mild asthma. Not unnaturally, we visit the practice nurse every two months. My child blows into the blower and sucks from the sucker and, once every six months or so, the nurse says, "You're coming on fine. That's great, but you have run out of the lozenge which has to go into the machine." When I say, "Right, I'll take some away now", she says, "Ah, I can't give you more because I cannot write a prescription". The doctor is busy next door—probably seeing one of my other children—so he cannot write the prescription right away. Therefore, I have to go away and come back the next day. That is the kind of inefficiency that the Bill can break through. Does my hon. Friend the Minister envisage that practice nurses will be able to write prescriptions if their GPs so wish? Will the Bill or the subsequent regulations that the Department will bring into effect allow that or will we have to agree amendments in Committee?

Everything in this country takes time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst is aware, this modest measure has taken a long time. The first report from Baroness Cumberlege appeared in 1986. Considering the most rapid progress that the Bill might make, it is proposed that the regulations will be in place by the autumn of 1993. With a little slippage, we are talking about 10 years between the birth of an idea and its practice.

However, that is the birth of this idea only in Britain. We must not forget that we are not reinventing the wheel. Nurse prescribing is practised widely in other countries that abhor bureaucracy and practise economic liberalism and which believe in having no layers of the onion skin between the patient and the doctor or nurse. Nurses prescribe in Canada and in most of the states in America. I hope that we will not set out on another study in the years ahead, but will act on this Bill with all speed and dispatch.

10.49 am

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak on this important measure. I join all hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on bringing forward this welcome measure. We know that this will be a truncated parliamentary Session. Therefore, the difficulties facing any private Member's Bill are even greater than usual. The Government's support for the measure is welcome. Indeed, the support of the Opposition, despite their somewhat reduced numbers today, is also welcome. We need all that support, and support in another place, to give the measure even the slightest chance of success in a shortened time scale. I am sure that all hon. Members wish it well.

At the outset, I stress that the points that I wish to make in no way detract from my support for what will be a welcome measure not only in rural areas, which are one of the wellsprings for it, but in heavily urbanised areas such as the one that I represent.

I wish to draw attention to a couple of aspects of the proposed restricted list of drugs and the formulary which the Bill will set up under regulations. I congratulate my hon. Friend on drafting, or allowing the Bill to be drafted, to permit much of the detail of the Bill to be dealt with by regulation rather than being in the context of the Bill itself. There is a considerable history of successful regulation by the Department of Health. The idea of a limited prescribing list began in the teeth of considerable opposition to the Department of Health, and it has proved

[Mr. Michael Stern]

to be far more successful than the medical profession and Her Majesty's Opposition thought at the time. Because of the rapid change in the work demanded of nurses within the community, there will be a need for equal flexibility within the Department of Health in respect of the powers given to nurses under the Bill.

My hon. Friend is entirely right, albeit that most of us normally deprecate legislation that effectively hands over substantial additional powers to Departments rather than them being within the review of the House. My hon. Friend is entirely right to pass that power to the Department and effectively take it from Parliament.

A regulated list of drugs or preparations under the control of the Department finds support in some rather surprising quarters. The Department's work in preparation for the Bill parallels work that has been done in the pharmaceutical world over many years, in particular leading up to the campaign which started a few years ago for pharmacists to be able to sell and advise on certain drugs without a prescription. I hope that the passage of the Bill will not damage that campaign by pharmacists to be able to use their professional knowledge and expertise to a greater extent and that the movement toward non-prescription will not be damaged by the movement towards greater freedom of prescription.

That work has received support from some surprising sources. I remember a pamphlet from the Institute of Economic Affairs some years ago—not a body to which one would normally look in such matters—which argued strongly for greater freedom for pharmacists to be able to sell without prescription. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reassure me that the movement toward greater freedom of non-prescription will not be harmed by the Bills.

The Bill refers to appropriate training for nurses in the use of the restricted list. It is worth dwelling on that for a moment. What may be appropriate training for a district nurse in a rural area may not be appropriate for a health visitor dealing with an area of urban stress. The demands on their time and their abilities to prescribe are likely to be totally different. I hope that, when considering the training schemes that will be set up under the Bill, my hon. Friend will give appropriate weight to the flexibility that will be needed to ensure that nurses are trained for the many tasks that will become necessary under the Bill. I suspect that that suggestion would lead to an unacceptably wide and demanding training course. Alternatively, I hope that my hon. Friend will look at some form of modular training so that a nurse who wishes to take on prescribing rights in, say, an urban area will be able to receive specific training in, for example, dealing with the homeless and areas containing a large number of people with tranquilliser dependency, such as occurs in at least one area of my constituency. Those demands will be totally different from those on a nurse who is training for the right to prescribe in some rural areas or, indeed, urban areas which do not suffer the same social stress.

I now refer to the signature of prescriptions which will be permitted under the Bill. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister how that will relate back to doctors, health authorities or other bodies responsible for a certain aspect of patient care with which the nurse will be dealing when the prescription is generated. In that connection, I draw my hon. Friend's attention to an organisation which, so far, has not been mentioned. My hon. Friend will know it well. I refer to the Prescription Pricing Authority, a body which is centered on Newcastle upon Tyne. One's first acquaintance with it would indicate that it is a great contributor to the welfare of the warehousing business in Newcastle upon Tyne, because it stores and sorts, under a system called PACT—prescription analysis and cost—every prescription that is ever written. That body does much unsung technical work to a very high level of professional expertise. Any family health services authority which wishes to inquire into the prescribing habits of a doctor or a practice will be able to go to the Prescription Pricing Authority and obtain from it, with appropriate safeguards, all prescriptions issued by that doctor or practice over a certain period. I do not have to tell the House the extent of the work that is necessary to provide that service.

At the moment, the Prescription Pricing Authority will work to a certain doctor, so the sorting mechanism at the PPA is determined by the need to sort by doctor or, frequently, by type of preparation. I wonder how the PPA will have to adapt its work. A district nurse or a nurse on the official list will sometimes work with a certain doctor or health authority. There may be other circumstances in which the ultimate responsibility for a validity of a prescription will not be relevant to a certain general practitioner. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can reassure the House that, under the Bill, the standards of control and the "findability" of prescriptions will be no less than those for prescriptions currently issued by a registered general practitioner.

Recommendation 5 of the Crown report refers to the type of work of nurses for whom prescribing could become useful. The recommendation states:

"In addition to nurses with a district nurse or health visitor qualification, certain community nursing staff who have successfully completed appropriate specialist education, training and assessment should be able within a patient specific protocol".

I emphasise the phrase "patient-specific" as it is underlined in the recommendation—

"to adjust the timing and dosage of medicines which are prescribed by medical practitioners."

That is an important recommendation.

The recommendation continues:

"At present we propose that community psychiatric nurses, community mental handicap nurses, specialist nurses for terminally ill patients and diabetic liaison nurses should be given this authority."

I entirely agree with that recommendation. It shows a breadth of understanding of the specialist work of the nursing profession which is highly commendable. However, one aspect of nursing is not covered by the recommendation. I refer to the case of qualified nurses who, under the general training provisions of the Bill, qualify for prescribing, but have chosen a career path that has led them to become matrons in nursing homes, especially for the elderly in the private sector. I have come across cases in my constituency where such matrons who in every way qualify to issue a prescription under the Bill are debarred and may continue to be debarred from issuing a prescription to a patient under their care because those matrons have no direct relationship with the general practitioner who has responsibility for the elderly patient in the nursing home.

The case of an elderly person living in my constituency who was urgently admitted to a nursing home on the other

side of Bristol has recently been drawn to my attention. That patient's GP practised in my constituency and was, therefore, unable to provide an immediate service to the patient. Shortly after the patient was admitted to the nursing home, and before there was time to transfer the patient to the care of a GP close to it, the patient needed a prescription. However, the matron was forced to say to that patient's children that she was sorry but was unable to help other than to arrange for the patient's admission to hospital so that an urgent prescription could be given. It would be helpful if matrons of nursing homes could, as of right under the Bill and subject to proper training, be given the same powers of prescription as will be given to other groups of nurses.

Clause 2 of the Bill rightly extends the duty of family health services authorities in England and Wales to cover the prescription duties. I should declare an indirect interest as my wife chairs such an authority. I assume that, under the Bill, when any nurse is acting for or working with a GP to issue a prescription, any complaint of an offence on the issue or non-issue of a prescription will be related to the nurse and the doctor by the family health service authority. I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to clarify that assumption. One assumes that a disciplinary hearing, which at present can be brought only against a doctor, could in future be brought against a nurse.

However, how will a family health services authority carry out a similar duty if there is a complaint about prescription by a nurse when he or she is acting for a health authority, for a home run by the social services or a privately run home that provides services to the social services authority? How will the family health service authority conduct a disciplinary hearing when the case does not relate to a practitioner who is registered with that authority? That may seem a technical point, but disciplinary hearings cause much anguish both to the practitioner and the patient. It is worth while to reassure all health service users and all nurses that there will be adequate mechanisms for coping with what I am sure will be very few disciplinary or complaints hearings.

There have been a number of comments in the debate on the Treasury's attitude to the proposals. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), I do not regret that the Treasury has not adopted an open-handed attitude as, by their very nature, Treasuries are debarred from so doing. I congratulate the Treasury on making available, through the money resolution and the Government's support for the Bill, the not insubstantial sum of money that it will cost to implement the legislation. Many apparently equally deserving proposals that would have cost less than the estimated cost of the Bill have been put to the Government and, regretfully, the Treasury has had to refuse. Treasury Ministers deserve praise, not grudging acceptance, for the fact that they are prepared to make available the necessary money.

The notes attached to the Bill make it clear that the sums involved will fall on the budget of the family health service, which generally seems entirely appropriate. But I hope that we may be assured that, when the regulations are drafted under the Bill, the budget of the family health service will not be unnecessarily put upon from either health authority budgets or social service budgets. That could happen as services are provided under the Bill that would otherwise have been paid for by health authority or social service budgets. I speak as an accountant and foresee a difficult accounting problem that should be addressed early. Inevitably, even given the greatly expanded funding that the Government have made available to the health service generally, there is still—rightly—considerable pressure of competition on all aspects of budgeting for resources in the health service. So the Minister should account in advance for some of the issues that will occur between budgets as a result of the Bill.

I underline some of the points made in the Touche Ross report about the likely costs of the measure. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh pointed out that much of it was guesswork, which means that the report must sometimes, inevitably, put figures to guesswork. Even so, those figures are based on the best analysis available. They take into account all the known factors, so that, although we must accept them with caution, it would be unwise to discount the figures.

Although we recognise—I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) takes issue with me on this—that there will be considerable savings in time resulting from nurses not having to travel backwards and forwards to get prescriptions filled out and redeliver them to patients, that degree of time saving, though welcome, will manifest itself not in cost savings but in the more efficient use of nursing time and, one hopes, in less delay in patients receiving the drugs that they need.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend is making the case for the inevitability of the extra time being made available by the Bill to district nurses being taken up by extra work by those nurses. Is that acceptable? We shall have many options to consider when the measure becomes law, including a reduction in the number of district nurses and the channelling of the resources so saved into other areas of health care. It would be unwise to reject those options at this stage of the Bill.

Mr. Stern: I accept that, and my hon. Friend is underlining in many respects the strength of the Bill in that it draws together the support of hon. Members who look at the issue from the standpoint of the greater service that will become available, for example, in some of the most stressful inner-city areas such as that which I represent. That advantage will apply right across the spectrum, through to the services that other hon. Members expect to receive in more rural or less stressful urban areas. I do not anticipate there being any reduction, as a result of the Bill, in the numbers or costs of the services in the area that I represent. But I expect a higher level of service and, I hope, slightly less stress on the providers of that service.

I welcome the Bill because it is about supporting the nursing profession and giving its members more facilities and greater ability to do their job. In that way, we shall not only assist the members of the nursing profession in a difficult and dangerous part of their work, but give them additional responsibilitiess which add to their problems.

I think of one area in my constituency, the walk-up flats in Lawrence Weston. I was recently taken round the area and during my visit, which lasted a day, saw some of the cases and problems that people face on a day-to-day basis. The Bill will not reduce the physical danger in which nurses sometimes find themselves, but it will help them to provide a better service in areas of high stress. It will also

[Mr. Stern]

help them to plan their day better, so enabling them to make more visits and use their time more effectively, for the benefit of their patients.

While we have been in office, there has been an unprecedented increase of about 68,000 in the number of active nurses in the profession. I welcome a measure which, I hope, will not decrease those numbers but will strengthen the hand of the profession in dealing with its problems.

11.15 am

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on coming high in the ballot and on choosing a subject that is close to the hearts of us all. We are all subject to the vagaries of health, and he has made it possible, by introducing the Bill, to improve the care that is available to the public at large and to make it more effective and efficient at the point of service.

I echo what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) in congratulating Christine Hancock on all the work that she has done in helping to bring the Bill forward. Before moving to her present position, she was the general manager of the Waltham Forest health authority, which covers my constituency. She may have been the first such general manager to occupy her present position, and her work has been extremely valuable.

In May last year my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) introduced a Bill under the ten-minute rule which was discussed on the Floor of the House on a Friday morning. It was unusual for such a Bill to come so close to achieving legislative effect. He managed it in a way that is almost unique to him, for he has introduced many ideas that have been taken up only after he thought of them. In that respect he is an admirable successor to his predecessor, our late-lamented colleague, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams. So not for the first time has my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington brought forward fresh ideas that have helped not only his constituents but the country as a whole.

Several reservations were registered to the Bill that my hon. Friend introduced last May, some of which I raise again in the hope that they will be answered. I spoke briefly when that Bill was debated on 3 May 1991, and at that time the Minister did not have an opportunity to deal with some of the issues that I raised.

It is crucial that nurses who are given power to prescribe have proper training, and obviously the power to prescribe should be limited to those who have had that training. It is essential for that not simply to involve going through various courses, but for those who go through them to prove that they have an understanding of, and achievement in, what was contained in the courses. Merely to have been sent on a course should not be sufficient proof that a nurse has grasped all the principles involved in this important and delicate matter of prescribing. Training is crucial. I suspect that it should be limited to a relatively small number of nurses, at least at the beginning.

The important question that needs to be addressed is precisely what nurses should be allowed to prescribe. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), in his excellent speech, read out a paragraph from the report of the Social Services Select Committee in which it was said:

"many witnesses believe that nurses should have freedom to prescribe a limited range of items, such as dressings, ointments and medical sprays, and that they should be able to use their professional judgment on matters such as the timing and dosage of drugs prescribed by doctors for pain relief."

If that report is accepted, the implication is that the Bill should cover only dressings, ointment and medical sprays, and the amount and timings of drugs already prescribed by a doctor.

I am not sure whether the Bill would allow nurses to prescribe new drugs. If it has that effect, we must consider it extremely carefully in the light of the negotiations and discussions since my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington introduced his Bill. That innovation would present dangers and problems. What would happen if a patient were prescribed two drugs that interacted with each other? I raised that problem in my few remarks on 3 May.

Frequently patients do not tell their doctor or nurse what they are taking. Therefore, a nurse could prescribe one drug which would react with another to provide a dangerous effect in the patient. We must guard against that. Doctors are well able to guard against that by reason of their training. If the Bill becomes law, as I sincerely hope it will, nurses, too, should be trained to deal with that. That probably applies even to an increase in dosage, to which the Select Committee report refers.

The next question raised during this morning's debate is precisely where nurses should be able to prescribe. There has been a difference of opinion on that. My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst said that health visitors and district nurses who travel a lot in the country should be able to prescribe. They do not want to have to go back to the doctor for a prescription for something about which they may know more than the doctor, then travel to a chemist and back to the patient. All the time that that procedure takes up would be saved.

If the circumstances are expanded to include nurses in hospitals writing prescriptions, altogether different questions arise. My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst said that it was not necessary for nurses in hospitals to prescribe because doctors are on hand and, with all their training, should be available to make the necessary prescriptions. He told us that that circumstance was, therefore, not covered by the Bill. I questioned my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington, who suggested that that circumstance should be covered in the Bill on the ground that if it was necessary for nurses in hospital to prescribe, as circumstances might suggest that it would be, the law should allow them to do so.

My hon. Friend is an eloquent proponent of liberalisation of all sorts, but we must be exceptionally careful with the prescription of drugs. Although they can bring great benefits, they can also cause great tragedies. We must be careful about the extent to which we liberalise our drugs regime.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) gave an example to show why it was necessary to consider at least the possibility of some hospital prescribing. He referred to the matron of a nursing home or some similar establishment and related how someone could not obtain a prescription from a doctor as there was no local link with a doctor. That tipped the balance in my mind between the views of my hon. Friend the Member for

Chislehurst and the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington. We should consider whether an amendment should perhaps be made in Committee.

This century matrons have acquired a respect. They were noticed only when they began to disappear as a result of some health reforms some time ago. I am delighted to say that matrons are now coming back, partly because of our health reforms. They are increasing our respect for the health service. Those who would prefer a doctor to a matron to give a prescription would often be considered to be rather odd.

Mr. Stern: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about matrons. He called for an amendment to the Bill, but he may well find on reading the Bill that the extension to which he referred could be dealt with by regulations under the Bill as it stands.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have read the Bill, and it deals with amendments to other legislation which one then must follow through and follow through and follow through. It is complicated to work out precisely the effects of "after the words 'exemption conferred' there shall be inserted the words 'or modification made'".
I am grateful to hear from my hon. Friend that that could be done by regulation. If that is so, I hope that my hon Friend the Member for Kensington will consider it.

The Bill will create for the first time—I am open to correction on this—two different forms of prescription: those produced by nurses, district nurses or health visitors, and those produced by doctors. An essential aspect of the Bill is that chemists must be able to tell at a glance which prescriptions are being presented to them. They must be able to ensure that nurses' prescriptions are limited to the drugs or appliances that are permitted by the regulations introduced under this legislation.

I am not sure how it is proposed that those prescriptions should be differentiated. Perhaps they should be on two different coloured prescription pads so that chemists may know that a white prescription comes from a doctor and a green prescription from a nurse. In that case a green prescripton would not permit a chemist to give over the counter to a nurse drugs that only a doctor can prescribe. That, of itself, would mean that not only nurses but chemists would need training as a result of the Bill. That is to be welcomed. Contrary to the belief of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West, I believe that the Bill may well produce financial savings as well as savings in time and effort. The training of chemists in that respect could easily be absorbed within the money resolution.

The Bill will save district nurses and health visitors time and journeys now wasted on going to the doctor, writing out the prescription for the doctor, persuading the doctor to sign it, going to the chemist, and taking the appliance, or whatever, to the patient. But doctors, who are very highly paid, will also experience a saving: they will no longer have to spend time dealing with prescriptions for patients about whom they propbably do not know very much.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West feels confident that the savings in time would be absorbed immediately by the extra work done by district nurses and, probably, by doctors. I disagree. One of the benefits of the health reforms that we have introduced is the fact that health authorities are being literally forced to be sensible about priorities, and to allocate resources accordingly. If they find that district nurses or health visitors have more time available as a result of the Bill, health authorities will have not only the ability but a positive duty to consider whether to reallocate the resources that have been saved —to hip replacement operations, for instance. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West, those resources might be used to increase the amount of productive work done by district nurses.

Mr. Stern: An artificial disagreement is being created. I agree that the Bill would allow resources to be reallocated, but I was trying not to give the impression that it would result in a net cost saving; it would merely result in an increased provision of service.

Mr. Arbuthnot: On that note of harmony, I shall move on to another point. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) said that trained nurses were leaving the national health service at a rate of 80,000 a year. I am not sure whether that statistic is correct, but I understand that there are now 69,000 more nurses and midwives than there were when the present Government took office. That may be a result of a pay increase of nearly 50 per cent. in real terms.

Nevertheless, the retention of nurses is essential. One advantage of the Bill is the increase in job satisfaction that it would give nurses. At present, a district nurse is forced to say to a patient, "I am sorry, but I cannot provide you with this ointment. It is silly, but I will have to go to a doctor who knows nothing about your case and get him to sign something that he probably will not read. I will then have to take the prescription to a chemist—who probably will not be able to read it—and bring the ointment back to you."

Not only is that process a waste of time; it humiliates the nurse or health visitor, and makes her feel that her job is menial—which it certainly is not, and which it should never be considered to be. The Bill would give that nurse or health visitor the responsibility that—in practice—she already exercises: she would be seen to have that responsibility. I believe that such an increase in job satisfaction would contribute greatly to the retention of district nurses and health visitors. Their job is already rewarding, but the Bill would make it more rewarding.

That valuable increase in the responsibility of district nurses and health visitors would also involve a valuable decrease in the burdens borne by doctors. I do not know whether the retention of doctors has been a problem, but, if so, the Bill might help to solve it.

Still more can be done to improve job security for nurses. We can increase the provision of training, not just in regard to prescriptions but in regard to other matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman is not using a Second Reading debate to make a general speech about the nursing profession, and that he will adhere more closely to the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I was going to say that I hoped that the Bill could be used to increase nurses' job satisfaction. Training is an essential aspect, and one reason for it is that increase in job satisfaction. I hope that the Bill will be used almost as a platform to give nurses the status of highly qualified medical practitioners—not quite on the same level as doctors, but more respected than they are now.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I do not wish to detract from the importance of what the hon.

[Mr. Gordon McMaster]

Gentleman is saying, or from the value of the Bill, but I was interested by his remarks about giving people a better quality of life and more job satisfaction. The next Bill on the Order Paper—the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill—is also very important, and many of us hope that we shall reach it today.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I am aware of that, and I shall end my speech shortly.

It is pointless to restrict the prescribing of medicines, ointments and appliances to doctors, given that the number of prescriptions with which they must deal makes it inevitable that they will sign forms without giving them proper attention, and without exercising the required clinical judgment. The same applies to Ministers: if they have to sign about 100 letters each day, they will inevitably sign some without reading them.

In many cases, nurses might well be better at prescribing than doctors. A district nurse with 25 years' experience would have much more knowledge of individual patients' needs and circumstances than a newly qualified doctor who did not have the same opportunity to get out and about.

I welcome the Bill. I am glad that both the Government and the Opposition support it, and I wish it every success.

11.37 am

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Although I am sure that we all appreciate the importance of reaching the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, I have no doubt that every hon. Member also appreciates the importance of this Bill, small though it is. It gives us the opportunity to comment both on the use of nursing resources generally and on the implications of the Bill for our constituents.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) for entering the Chamber towards the end of his speech; I was inadvertently delayed. As I came in he was saying, in effect, that the Bill need not be extended to cover hospital nurses, because doctors were normally in attendance. Would that that were the case.

I welcome the Bill. Like many others, I have long believed that the medical skills of our experienced nurses are an underused resource. The more that we can utilise their skills, the better it will be for patient care. The Bill is a small step in the right direction. It inches forward when perhaps we could have taken a giant step for mankind, but I hope that it will be used to go further, perhaps within the regulations that might follow.

I hope that we shall not lose the momentum to develop further the use of skilled and experienced nurses for services where the patient is not getting that speedy and rapid service that he or she desires, There is a long way to go. I do not go as far as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who wished to apply Mr. Samuel Brittan's rules of economic liberalism to prescribing. I accept some of his economic prescriptions, but not his medical prescriptions.

I accept, too, that we must be careful of simplistic solutions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) said clearly and concisely, not only benefits but risks will be conferred by easier prescribing.

One understands why the medical profession moves carefully and slowly, but it can go too slowly and I suggest that it has done so. Although the Bill is welcome, the Cumberlege report was published in 1986 and it will be a long time before the benefits of the Bill are conferred on midwives, community nurses and patients. I hope that the medical profession will try to speed up the process whereby we extend the use of nursing skills into other areas.

I am sorry if I missed the more detailed explanation that my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst gave of why it is not necessary to extend prescribing rights to hospital nurses. Perhaps we shall hear more from my hon. Friend the Minister about that.

I feel strongly about the Bill because in my constituency —I am sure that this experience is shared in other constituencies—the services of smaller hospitals have been progressively cut. Services have been concentrated on general district hospitals. The acute services and other facilities of smaller hospitals and, indeed, of medium-sized hospitals have been cut. Those cuts have been made under every Government in the past 25 years. To a large extent, it has been a question not of resources but of changing medical practice. In areas such as the Isle of Sheppey—this is echoed elsewhere in the United Kingdom—acute local hospital services are now denied to local people, who must travel further afield for urgent medical attention.

A welcome new trend is the greater emphasis on primary care hospitals, community hospitals or GP hospitals, whichever is the preferred term. Some of the primary care hospitals will be substantial. None the less, we cannot expect them to be manned constantly by consultants, trainee doctors or GPs, who might be on call. Many emergencies and minor matters will have to be treated at a district general hospital many miles away.

It is extraordinary that a highly trained but relatively inexperienced paramedic ambulance driver may take a patient to hospital, but a senior nurse at that hospital with 20 or 30 years' experience cannnot use the same equipment to the same degree as the paramedic. That does not make sense.

There is a new senior grade of nurses—nurse practitioners. I am unaware of the extent to which they are being encouraged to practise. My impression is that their use is not widespread, but it would be a tremendous step forward if nurse practitioners, with the ability to prescribe and use the emergency equipment, were encouraged to practise in smaller primary care hospitals. All nurse practitioners should certainly also practise in the larger new health centres operated by general practitioners.

That seems such common sense that I suspect that it would receive widespread support, as long as it was done within the proper disciplines and standards that we expect of the health service. But it all seems to be taking so long —and time that we do not have—when the speed of change in the hospital service is so great and when facilities are being closed rapidly to meet the increasing demands of modern technology and science. We should be moving quickly to release the tremendous resources and skills of those nurses.

Are there any impediments to developing the nurse practitioner facility in the hospitals that I am talking about? Close to my heart is Sheppey general hospital, which has lost many acute services. It will soon be redeveloped as a fully fledged substantial community hospital. The same applies to Sittingbourne hospital. It would mean much to my constituents if nurse practitioners were able to use their skills and resources in a 24-hour minor casualty service. If the problem is extending

prescribing powers—I think that it might be—would the Bill allow the extension of prescribing powers to nurse practitioners? Or is the problem money? If many nurses are promoted to higher grades to carry out those services, is there a problem of relativity within the nursing profession and, if so, could it be resolved by extra resources? If that is so, it is an issue which we must tackle.

I return to what I said at the beginning. The real problem is that in many hospitals doctors are not on hand at all times and must be called in, which takes time. For that reason, casualties are often directed to other hospitals many miles away. That is an unsatisfactory situation which could be solved by the philosophy contained in the Bill.

I have said how far I should like the Bill to go and why it is important, but I regret that it has taken us so long to get this far. However, I welcome the Bill for what it says explicitly and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst on introducing a measure which will help the elderly and chronically disabled people in my constituency and elsewhere. It will help people in rural areas—such areas are a large part of my constituency—and it will encourage nurses and give them greater job satisfaction. Many of them undoubtedly have great skills which should be better used. The Bill will save their time because they will no longer have to go to the surgery to get a prescription signed. It is in general a good measure which should be warmly welcomed. I wish it a speedy passage, but I hope that we shall use it as a foundation stone on which to build more extensive involvement for senior and experienced nurses in the delivery of good patient care.

11.51 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate), I shall be brief because I appreciate the importance of moving on to the next Bill. I join him in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) on the introduction of this important measure. It is right that it should be properly debated, especially when one bears in mind the fact that the three categories of health service workers mentioned in the Bill perform a very important task.

I pay tribute to the work of nurses, midwives and health visitors. I have had a great deal of contact with them during my 23 years as a teacher, during one or two spells in hospital and during my constant hospital visits to my sick constituents which I and all my hon. Friends and all hon. Gentleman make.

It must be said that nurses, midwives and health visitors already undertake virtually the duties set out in this valuable Bill. They cannot do so by law, but they have a good knowledge of the drugs that patients need. They are in constant contact with patients—at least in hospitals—and are well aware of any changes in a person's health. Like most doctors, they know what medicines are needed in a particular situation. In my experience of hospitals, I found that nurse would tell patients that they needed this, that or the other and that they would write the prescription. They could not sign it but they could produce it.

It seems absurd that such health workers do not have the written and delegated legal authority to sign prescriptions when they have the knowledge to suggest a prescription. They also have the detailed knowledge that only a nurse can have—in many cases, more so than the doctor—of the way in which a patient reacts in the short and in the long term to a particular medicine. Such workers are in an almost unique position to suggest sudden changes in medication and it would be right and proper if they had the authority to authorise such changes.

Hospitals are well geared to handle nurses' prescriptions just as they are geared to handle doctors' prescriptions. After all, there is a pharmacy in most hospitals and nurses' prescriptions could be used or cashing in—so to speak—in such pharmacies as well as anyone else's. Therefore, the health service is well geared to responding to the measures set out in the Bill should it be enacted.

What about midwives? Surely they, more than almost any other category of health service official, operate on their own. When my three children were born I was present on each occasion. We did not see much of any doctors; the midwife was the figure—the health service representative—with whom my wife and I continued to deal afterwards. She must have had a unique knowledge of the health or otherwise of our children and must have been in a position to suggest and authorise any medication required. Happily, none was required in our case, but we all know that, sadly, in many instances midwives have to suggest to doctors particular medication for mothers and babies if doctors are unable to get to them. It is ridiculous that midwives do not have the final authority.

Sir David Price: My hon. Friend will be aware of the fact that under separate legislation midwives today have limited powers of prescribing.

Mr. Greenway: I am aware that they have limited powers of prescribing. They always have had such powers, but why should they be limited? My grandmother was a midwife and as children we used to walk around with her and she would point to some enormous man or woman and say that he or she was one of her babies. She would then give a detailed explanation of the parent of that child and the medication needed. She could do a great deal even all those years ago, but midwives still do not have the full powers for which we are arguing.

Health visitors also have limited powers. I should not want anyone in this country or anyone else in the world to have unlimited powers, because that is unhealthy. However, health visitors should have fuller powers than they have at present. I have had much contact with health visitors in schools and the work that they do with mothers and children. There are not many parents who do not have more than one child and a child's school attendance is often affected by the health or otherwise of a younger child, especially when the parents have to go out to work. In those circumstances, the younger child is often visited by the health visitor who will advise parents on how to handle the particular case. It does not make sense for health visitors not to have the full authority to dispense prescriptions.

From every point of view, the Bill has a great deal to offer. It will resolve a problem that should have been dealt with long ago, perhaps even when the health service first came into being but certainly shortly afterwards. For nurses, midwives and health visitors not to have the authority and powers set out in the Bill is, in a sense, a slap in the face for them. It is a denial of their professionalism and their contribution and of the fact that their

[Mr. Greenway]

contribution could save the valuable time of doctors and sometimes of consultants and others. I strongly support the Bill.

12 noon

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I shall be very brief because I am conscious that hon. Members are waiting to debate the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims), first, on winning his place in the ballot, and, secondly, on what I think will be viewed as an excellent choice of subject for health care, especially by the patients. I declare an interest in the medical field, as listed in the Register of Members' Interests.

This is an excellent Bill, which is long overdue. The fact that nurses cannot prescribe does not keep up with today's world and the level of education that nurses have reached. That fact militates against patients because doctors and others who prescribe are overloaded. It also decreases the efficiency of nurses.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) that the Bill should be seen as the thin end of the wedge for future legislation.

My constituency is a rural area. In addition to the City of Winchester, we have the towns of Alton, Bishop's Waltham and Arlesford, but there are also some 74 villages. The Bill will be given a special welcome in rural areas because it will greatly increase the efficiency of nurses and midwives. It will also increase the efficiency of doctors, because a load will be taken off them. The Bill will also increase the morale of doctors, midwives and nurses. It will greatly benefit patients in the NHS, especially those in rural areas where the inefficiency and inconvenience of travelling backwards and forwards to surgeries are so manifest.

I wish the Bill all success on its passage through the House.

12.1 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): Many hon. Members have made clear in the debate their strong commitment to the introduction of nurse prescribing. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn), who has played such an important part in these matters. It is perhaps fitting that my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) paid a tribute to the predecessor of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington, Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, whose wife is chairman of the family health services authority in that area, and she does a magnificent job.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst paid tribute to the work of our noble Friend Baroness Cumberlege. He hopes that she will steer the Bill through another place. Her work for community nurses is second to none. That work, which she is now able to carry forward as chairman of a regional health authority, ensures that right at the heart, in the leadership of the NHS, there is someone with special knowledge and authority in this area.

I wish to remind the House of the context of the debate, both the development of the service and the status of nurses, into which nurse prescribing fits. It is a step of great significance, which I believe will mean that the status of nurses, which is so fundamental to the health service, is reinforced and enhanced.

Our commitment to the health service is based on our determination to improve services for patients—nothing more, nothing less. That is why in the health reforms outlined in the patients charter we have spelt out our commitment to patients, especially the commitment to have a named nurse so that patients know to whom they should turn in times of difficulty, whether that be a midwife, a nurse or a health visitor. We are already seeing remarkable results. The maximum use of those who work in the service is fundamental to our being able to deliver further and improved patient care.

I am grateful to those hon. Members who have seen the Bill in the context of our introduction of care in the community. It is essential that those community nurses make a maximum contribution to enhancing the care of patients once they have left hospital. We know about the improvements in hospital care for the elderly—the 43 per cent. rise in geriatric consultants and the 84 per cent. rise in the number of elderly patients treated. However, patients are increasingly treated in the community and the support of community nurses is important.

I appreciate the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes), who spelt out the three long-standing aims of the Royal College of Nursing, all of which have been achieved. He referred to the work of Trevor Clay, and then paid tribute to his successor, Christine Hancock. I thank my hon. Friend for his warm remarks about Dame Anne Poole, who, as chief nursing officer, has made an important contribution and has ensured that the interersts of nurses, midwives and health visitors are kept in the forefront of our considerations.

One of the first decisions of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was to appoint the chief nursing officer to the policy board so that, as we considered reforms and changes, we had her advice at the centre of our considerations.

Nurses have achieved an independent pay review body. As hon. Members have made clear, their pay has risen by 48 per cent. in real terms, ahead of inflation, since 1979. Pay is important, but so is training. Again, I thank hon. Members for their reference to Project 2000. Some £207 million has been put into that new form of nurses' training, to provide the qualified nurses that we need for the next century. We need those dedicated professionals, and we must get a better balance between classroom skills and hands-on care.

We have provided a better career structure under the new clinical grading structure introduced in 1988. Nurses now have better opportunities than ever before if they remain in clinical practice. Last year, we introduced a new senior nurse structure, which provides greater flexiblity and access to performance-related pay. Just this week the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill completed its Committee stage. It will strengthen the professional self-regulation of nursing. Again, we worked closely with the professions to ensure that we have the mechanisms in place that can best enable self-regulation and the control of training. Those are very important steps. The hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) was wrong to suggest that nurse prescribing could have been appended to that important and significant Bill.

I must mention the work of the nursing development units and nursing audit. In a number of areas there is a practical commitment to recognising and enhancing the role of nurses. Nurse prescribing fits well into that background. It will be a significant and worthwhile improvement in the services for patients. They will be able to get their medicines and dressings more quickly, and so have speedier treatments. Nurses will have greater responsibilities as professionals in their own right. The Bill builds on our determination to ensure that nurses achieve their rightful status in the health service.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): One of the important issues in nurse prescribing is the number of nurses who work for general practitioners. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the fact that in 1979 there were only 990 nurses in general practice, whereas in October 1990 there were 7,700 full-time equivalents—making 13,520 nurses in general practice. Is not that a remarkable achievement, which underlines the case for the Bill?

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend is right in his figures. I am grateful for his comment. The role of the practice nurse is important. Primary health care has been transformed beyond recognition. More general practitioners are using computers. The whole area of general practice is developing. The practice nurse plays a vital role in that. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I shall explain how we envisage the increasing involvement of practice nurses.

It is important to go into the details, even if only briefly, because it is a significant and important step. A number of comments during the debate show that there is some misunderstanding about precisely how the new arrangements will work.

We have long supported the principle of nurse prescribing. In 1986, the Cumberlege report on community nursing recommended:

"The DHSS should agree a limited list of items and simple agents which may be prescribed by nurses as part of a nursing care programme, and issue guidelines to enable nurses to control drug dosage in well-defined circumstances."

The Government accepted that recommendation in principle and, through our standing medical nursing and midwifery and pharmaceutical advisory committees, set up the advisory group on nurse prescribing to advise us "how arrangements for the supply of drugs, dressings, appliances and chemical reagents to patients as part of their nursing care in the community might be improved by enabling such items to be prescribed by a nurse, taking into account where necessary current practice and likely developments in other areas of nursing practice."

The recommendations of the advisory group included a considerable number that required further work. One of the key aspects was the economic implications. Now that we have completed that further work, we are in a position to support nurse prescribing in practice as well as in principle.

I share the feelings of many hon. Members who wish that we had been able to make speedier progress. However, it is important to ensure that we have examined all the aspects—costings, cost-effectiveness, the mechanisms of how the prescriptions will be organised and referred back, and how the other professional groups have responded.

One of the reasons why we have received such warm and wide support for the measure is that we have been able to take the time to consult effectively and to take people with us. The advisory group report recommended that certain groups of nurses working in the community should be authorised to prescribe from a limited list of products and to supply medicines or vary their timing and dosage, within agreed protocols.

My hon. Friend's Bill provides the primary legislation to enable prescribing aspects of the recommendations to be implemented. Those are the aspects of most interest to community nurses, GPs, pharmacists and—most important—patients and their carers. I should also mention—this has been raised in the debate—that at the same time we are taking forward the recommendations concerning supply and changing timing and dosage. That aspect does not require primary legislation; it is a question of agreed protocols.

In its recommendations about prescribing, the report considered that nurses working in the community who had a district nurse or health visitor qualification should be permitted to prescribe the items that they needed for the nursing care of their patients. That is the basis on which we have worked in preparing the secondary legislation needed to turn my hon. Friend's Bill into a reality.

My hon. Friends the Members for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) and for Faversham (Mr. Moate) and others have said that they support the idea with regard to community nurses and asked, "What about hospital nurses?" The advisory group reported in the context of community nurses, but the Bill would establish a framework whereby the concept could be extended to hospital nurses.

I was interested in what my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh said about people working in ophthalmic casualty. Before we took that further step, however, careful consideration and consultation would be required.

Mr. Moate: I am interested to hear my hon. Friend say that. Is she suggesting that such a consultation process might be put in hand or that she would view favourably the beginnings of such consultation—the start of a process of extending the provisions to cover hospital nurses?

Mrs. Bottomley: At this stage our view is that we welcome the Bill and would like to see it translated into practice, but we do not envisage community nurses being able to prescribe until October 1993. Then there is further work to be done in considering what other items may be made available and how other groups may be incorporated. Special consideration should always be given to the role of groups such as community psychiatric nurses and others, and to the items that they may be able to prescribe.

A move such as that envisaged by my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham is therefore a considerable way off. We must be sure that we have established the right framework for the first group before opening our minds to the question whether others might have an important part to play.

My hon. Friend made a point—perhaps I should deal with it now rather than later—about the changing role of the health service and the development of community hospitals. He spoke of the combination of acute high-tech medicine in district general hospitals, alongside more effective and sophisticated comprehensive care in the community. The point was well made and we certainly wish the role of the nurse, whether in the hospital or in the community, to be developed and maximised.

[Mrs. Bottomley]

As I have said, we want appropriate nurses to be able to prescribe the items that they need for the nursing care of their patients. There will be a formulary of items that they may prescribe which represents the items that nurses in the community with district nurse and health visitor qualifications might need for the care of their patients, and which it would be appropriate for them to prescribe. Some hon. Members may have envisaged that nurses will be able to prescribe a far wider range of items than is proposed.

The Joint Formulary Committee, which produces the British national formulary and the dental practitioners' formulary has set up a sub-committee to produce a nurse prescribers' formulary. Medical, nursing and pharmaceutical interests are represented on the sub-committee, which has already met twice, and plans to complete its work in the summer. We are very grateful for its urgent help.

Hon. Members who are interested in the types of product that nurses will be allowed to prescribe should refer to the illustrative formulary in the advisory group report. Items include laxatives, stoma care products, pain killers such as aspirin and paracetamol, skin preparations, and a wide range of appliances and dressings. Most items can be bought over the counter by patients. The illustrative formulary lists a number of prescription-only medicines: Nystatin, for oral fungal infection; Clotrimazole, an antifungal preparation; Iodosorb, a medicated dressing; and Varidase, a desloughing agent. We anticipate that the final nurse prescribers' formulary will cover the same range of items, or similar items.

Other aspects have been raised by hon. Members—about the full implications of the Bill, about the nurses who will be able to prescribe and about their qualifications.

The advisory group gave very careful consideration to which groups of community nurses it would be appropriate to allow to prescribe and recommended that, at least initially, prescribing should be limited to those holding a district nurse or health visitor qualification. Secondary legislation under the proposed Act will, therefore, limit prescribing to appropriately qualified district nurses and health visitors working in the community. Before such nurses may prescribe, they will, of course, need training in nurse prescribing. In future, nurse prescribing will be integrated in district nurse and health visitor training courses, but at present we are working urgently and closely with the UKCC and the national boards to produce a nurse prescribing training module for those currently employed.

Many hon. Members will know a great deal about the work of the UKCC and the national boards, as we have spent some hours in Committee discussing their work. Hon. Members will be pleased to know that extra money has been made available for the training module. We have provided funds in 1992-93 for setting up the courses and providing training materials. We have also provided funds for 1993-94 and 1994-95 for running the training modules at the various centres around the country that run district nurse and health visitor courses. In England, taking account of practice nurses with district nurse or health visitor qualifications there are about 25,000 potential nurse prescribers. Some of those will leave or retire before implementation, and they will usually be replaced by nurses who have received nurse prescribing training as part of their initial training, so we anticipate that about 23,000 would-be nurse prescribers will attend the special course between April 1993 and April 1995.

The UKCC has advised us about standards, kind, content and length of courses. The national boards are now organising further discussions with course tutors. I know that my hon. Friends will want to be satisfied about the courses, because we are taking a new step and it is important to consider all the aspects.

The courses will cover, of course, the items on the nurse prescribers' formulary—drug interactions, reporting adverse reactions, communication with other professionals, good practice in prescribing, budgetary accountability and monitoring and all the other relevant issues. The courses will need to meet the criteria set by the UKCC and to be approved by the national boards.

At the end of the courses, potential nurse prescribers will be assessed and only if they reach the required standard of knowledge will they be allowed to prescribe. Nurses who have satisfactorily completed the training module will have their details submitted by the national boards to the UKCC which will be able to identify them as nurse prescribers on the UKCC register. Eligibility to prescribe can then be checked by bona fide inquirers with the UKCC at any time. It has been important to ensure that we consider all those angles to ensure also that, as we start the new move, it is carefully monitored and properly prepared for.

Budgetary accountability and monitoring were mentioned, scarcely surprisingly, fairly thoroughly by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern), as well as by a number of other hon. Members. My hon. Friend has expert knowledge in these questions and a close awareness of the working of the family health services authorities. I made it clear that one of the areas that would-be nurse prescribers would need to address was budget accountability. We plan that the cost of nurses' prescribing, specifically the net ingredient cost of the items that they prescribe and the pharmacist fees, will be met in the family health services budget.

It is not appropriate to meet the costs from the hospital and community health services budget because, on the whole, nurse prescribers will be prescribing for general practitioners' patients and if the community nurses were not prescribing for them, the general practitioners would be doing so.

If nurse prescribers are practice nurses—that is, employed by GPs—we envisage their prescribing costs being linked to their GPs' indicative or actual prescribing budgets. If nurse prescribers are health authority employed, we envisage each provider unit being responsible for prescribing costs. More work is needed in that area before final decisions can be made. Through the Prescription Pricing Authority, GPs and community nurse managers will be able to monitor the patterns of their nurses' prescribing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford raised the question whether there would be a differentiation between GP and nurse prescriptions. We intend that nurse prescriptions will be a different colour from GP prescriptions. I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that pharmacists already manage to distinguish between GPs' and dentists' prescriptions, so there will be

no difficulty in identifying a nurses' prescription. Apart from the different colour, the prescription will have the nurse prescriber's name on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West also raised the question of the Prescription Pricing Authority and its work. The PPA, which does not always get the tribute it deserves, is a remarkably efficient and effective body. It will be able to identify the nurse prescribing undertaken by a particular group of nurses attached to GPs or by nurses prescribing in the community. It intends to identify the amount spent on nurse prescribing, not by individual nurses, but only according to a nurse's unit of employment.

Mention has been made of the Touche Ross report. I am the first to acknowledge that these questions are complex.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Would not it be beneficial to have the prescribing practices of individual nurses identifiable, if purely from a budgetary standpoint?

Mrs. Bottomley: That is a matter to which we have given careful consideration. My hon. Friend's point would introduce an extra layer of complexity. We are talking to health authorities and especially to those in the family health services about the further steps tha. we need to take in monitoring the prescribing practices of, particularly, community nurses. Our judgment is that the most helpful way to take the matter forward is to be able to identify the nurse prescribing undertaken according to the GP practice in which the nurse is employed or according to her employment in the community. We can, no doubt, consider that aspect further as we finalise details.

According to the Touche Ross report, apart from the one-off cost of implementation, nurse prescribing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst said, will cost the Exchequer £15 million a year in England. Most of the extra costs—£11·65 million—are estimated to come from the cost of additional items prescribed. In addition, there are the cost of pharmacists' dispensing fees, costs at the PPA for pricing nurses' prescriptions and monitoring them, the cost of providing copies of the nurses' formulary, the drug tariff and prescription pads, and various other administrative costs.

Against those costs, we must consider the considerable benefits available from introducing nurse prescribing. There will be concrete benefits in terms of community nurses and GPs being able to save time. Nurses will no longer have to make trips to the surgery to get prescriptions signed, as several hon. Members eloquently described. GPs will no longer have to sign those prescriptions. Those time savings are considerable in total, although none of us believes that those time savings have the significance that the benefit of the measure would have in improved service for patients and for the convenience of those who are in the community.

There will be improvement in terms of the satisfaction of community nurses who will know that they can take full responsibility for the nursing care that they provide. It is ludicrous that district nurses with years of experience must bother GPs to get them to sign prescriptions for the nursing care of patients. I am very pleased that, through the Bill, we can recognise the skills and competence of community nurses.

The safety of patients will not be compromised. I have already outlined the special training that will take place. I mentioned the nurse prescribers' formulary which will mostly contain medicines and appliances that patients can buy over the counter. We also fully recognise the importance of good communications between nurse and doctor to ensure good-quality care for patients and to maintain patient safety. We shall issue further guidance before implementing nurse prescribing on the handling of adverse reactions and on the maintenance of patient records.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst rightly asked about implementation. Having reached this stage, he, like my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and many others who have championed the cause so excellently, wants to ensure that we achieve our implementation date of October 1993. We are working to a good timetable. We shall begin work on the regulations as soon as the Bill becomes an Act. There should be no problem in preparing the regulations in accordance with that time scale.

There is more to be done. There is the secondary legislation under the Medicines Act 1968 and under the National Health Service Act 1977 to specify the types of nurses, the training and the circumstances. We are already consulting all interested parties before we can make the statutory instrument under the Medicines Act.

Clearly, the question of legal liability is important. Nurses are professionally personally accountable for their actions. In terms of legal liability for actions carried out in the course of their duties, their employers take vicarious responsibility, so that health authorities will be responsible for the prescribing activities of health-authority employed nurses and general practitioners will be responsible for their practice nurses' prescribing. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West referred in particular to the family health services authorities and their service committee hearing proceedings. It will be the GP who is subject to such proceedings because it is the GP who is answerable, but all nurses are subject to the control of the UKCC, so in cases of professional misconduct, whether involving a practice nurse or a nurse in the community, should there be difficulties, proceedings could be taken by the UKCC.

Hon. Members have made it clear that they take a close interest in the role of pharmacists. My hon. Friends the Members for Wanstead and Woodford and for Walthamstow (Mr. Summerson) will know that we are already working on the wider role of community pharmacists. I can advise my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes)—without whose contributions a debate on health matters would be almost empty—that recent information was sent to community pharmacists on the vital question of head lice, which he brought to the attention of the House. I hope that that reassures him on that front.

We are also working to consider those items that could more appropriately be provided over the counter. Obviously safety is the key criterion in deciding whether an item should be prescription-only or whether it should be available over the counter. The Secretary of State acts on the advice of the independent Committee on the Safety of Medicines and the Medicines Commission in reaching such a decision. I am grateful to my hon. Friends for their comments.

I want to comment briefly on the importance of retention and recruitment and the role of nurses in the service generally, to which the hon. Member for Peckham

[Mrs. Bottomley]

referred. We were the first Government Department to sign up to Opportunity 2000. We were congratulated only the other day by Lady Howe on our work towards ensuring that we continue to enjoy the excellent retention rates that we have now established. I can report to the House that the average length of stay for any nurse in the service is now 14 years as against the seven that it was some years ago.

We have explicitly stated our goals under Opportunity 2000. We in the health service have given ourselves eight goals that we shall achieve before 1994, and two of them particularly relate to nurses. First, we should not allow the number of midwives, nurses and health visitors leaving the profession to increase. We are proud of the position that we have reached and we want to maintain it. Secondly, those returning after a career break or maternity leave should be able to return to their job at the same grade as they were in when they left it.

We want job-splitting and job-sharing to be the norm in the service. It is up to employers to explain why women should not job-share rather than for individuals to seek to negotiate the arrangement. We are well in the forefront of developments, seeking to ensure that the NHS is not only the largest employer of women in Britain but the most enlightened. We know that it is our ability to use our staff to the full and to ensure that we have flexible employment patterns that will enable us to achieve the health goals to which we are all strongly committed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) mentioned midwives. The Bill has the support of many midwives, some of whom are with us today. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh drew attention to the special role of midwives since 1902. They already have satisfactory arrangements for obtaining the drugs that they are allowed to supply and administer, but it is important that the Bill's provisions should include them, as we may need to extend to them the ability to prescribe, which they do not have at present. I hope that, as we make good headway on the Bill, we shall be able to extend and develop its provisions through secondary legislation.

We all welcome my hon. Friend's determination to ensure that all the necessary measures are in place. We all believe that the role of nurses is fundamental to the health service. We wish the Bill extremely well and congratulate my hon. Friend. I hope that, on the many important points of detail, I have been able to satisfy my hon. Friend and the House of the rigour, care and commitment surrounding this most important measure.

12.34 pm

Mr. Sims: With the leave of the House, may I first apologise for not being present when my hon. Friend the Minister began her speech. I had to leave the Chamber for a few minutes to meet a group of district nurses who wanted to tell me how very much they support the Bill and to express their anxiety that it should pass through all its stages before the end of this Parliament.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for her remarks about the Bill and for her support for it. I thank also hon. Members on both sides of the House for their kind remarks about me and, in particular, for their support for the Bill. That augurs well, and I hope that the Bill will now make rapid progress and that the district nurses who came to see me, and who do such a wonderful job, will not be disappointed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.35 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill's wholly legitimate purpose is to meet the undoubted moral right of disabled people to full citizenship and social equality. The Bill aims to confer long-awaited civil rights and freedoms on millions of people with physical, mental and sensory disabilities. As all hon. and right hon. Members know from their postbags, the outcome of this debate is anxiously awaited not only by our disabled constituents, but by all their organisations and by everyone who works with and among them. I myself have had a huge correspondence in support of the Bill. Let me quote briefly from just two letters.

First, Peter Large of the Disablement Income Group, whose distinguished work for disabled people is well known to this House, describes the Bill as

"the essential foundation on which campaigns of education and persuasion can be mounted and true good will, as opposed to 'do-gooding', can be enabled to flourish."

He says as well:

"In the absence of such legislation people with disabilities will never be enabled fully to enjoy their rightful place in society."

Peter Large is uniquely well placed to make these comments, as his letter reminds us. It says:

"The Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People, which you set up as the then Minister in 1979 and I had the honour to Chair, reported in 1982 the need for legislation to combat unreasonable discrimination. We have thus already waited 10 years for this legislation, losing 10 years hoping that education and persuasion and the voluntary application of goodwill would eventually transform disabled people's lives. We now know they will not. We were right to believe that campaigns to educate and persuade are too costly and ineffective in the absence of a legislative foundation of acceptable behaviour."

Secondly, I want to quote from a letter of support from Sir John Wilson, chairman of The Impact Foundation, than whom very few people in any country can have given more distinguished service to blind people. A blind person himself, Sir John writes most hearteningly:

"Good luck for your Private Member's Bill on Anti-Discrimination next Friday. We will all be rooting for you!"

Today is not the first time this House has been asked to implement the report of the official inquiry I appointed Peter Large to chair in 1979. Nor is this the only time that disabled people whose daily experience is of unequal treatment and unjustified discrimination have looked to Parliament to set right the deep sense of injustice they feel.

The House may recall the ten-minute Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Mr. Ashley), and the two debates which took place on similar measures in 1983. I myself was present and spoke in those debates and well remember the bitter disappointment felt by supporters of the earlier Bills when their paths were blocked by what was seen then as Government antipathy.

Many years have elapsed since then, but, in my view, more than simply time has passed. I detect a very different climate both in this House and beyond for today's debate on my Bill. Far from time's passage weakening the case for this Bill, the argument is stronger now than ever before for extending our anti-discrimination legislation into this field. The social changes the Bill seeks are urgently necessary, widely supported and fully justified, but will not come about without a change in the law.

The recent change of climate was well exemplifed by the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) on the BBC Radio 4 programme "You and Yours" on 21 January. He summarised his current attitude to giving disabled people a legal remedy against unjustified discrimination as "benevolently neutral". Not very long ago the Government's attitude was widely seen as "malevolently hostile" by the organisations that represent disabled people. Naturally I welcome the change of climate, just as I rejoice in the fact that my Bill's co-sponsors are from all parties in this House. They demonstrate that increasingly now the argument is seen not so much as a clash between right and left, but as one between right and wrong.

Twenty-one years ago, when my Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Bill was passed, itself in part an anti-discrimination measure, the first of its kind in any country, Britain led the world in disability legislation. Today we lag behind. Other countries at first copied and have now overtaken us. Many have legislated to end unfair discrimination against disabled people, not least the United States. President Bush set the tone for the 1990s when he signed the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and told the American business community:

"You have in your hands the key to the success of this Act, for you can unlock a splendid resource of untapped human potential that, when freed, will enrich us all . . . Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down."

There was not much benevolent neutrality about that statement. It was an act of political leadership that is widely admired by disabled people across the world. They look to this House today to give the same kind of leadership. Our commitment is shown to be doubly needed by a recent survey by the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People. It found that 6 per cent. of British employers were unwilling to employ any disabled person "under any circumstances" at a time when employable disabled people are six times more likely than non-disabled people to be turned down for a job.

That is not only outrageous, but a challenge to this House, which legislated nearly 50 years ago to require firms with 20 or more employees to give 3 per cent. of jobs to disabled people. We must not duck that challenge today.

Unless words have lost their meaning, when the Minister says he is "benevolently neutral" towards my Bill he must mean that, with me, he would most strongly deprecate any attempt to frustrate a Second Reading today. He especially will know that any such attempt would provoke intense exasperation and indeed fury among disabled people and their organisations.

The case for the Bill has two sides—it has a moral one, which begs the question, "What sort of society do we want to create?" And it has a pragmatic one, namely "What do we have to do to make that society?"

I shall deal with the moral arguments briefly, since no one has yet attempted seriously to contradict them. Let me recall some deservedly famous words of Martin Luther King when he dismissed the case for relying only on education and persuasion to end racial prejudice:

"Morality cannot be legislated, but behaviour can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless."

It is an affront to civilised values, in a country claiming to respect human rights, for citizens with a present or past

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disability to suffer prejudice, exclusion and both demeaning and unjustified treatment for no other reason than their disability. It is shameful that to the restrictions their disability imposes is added the gratuitous extra handicap that attidudinal and physical barriers create. Let no one in this House imagine that such discrimination is a thing of the past.

Who can justify, to quote one of the many examples given by Lord Snowdon, in a fine speech in another place, the shameful treatment of a young policewoman, injured, ironically, while displaying conspicuous bravery in the course of her duties, who was turned away from a charity event because, and only because, she was in a wheelchair.

What about the conduct of taxi drivers who refuse to carry blind people, as now happens every day, if they have guide dogs? Or the practice of employers who never shortlist any job applicant who discloses a disability? Research by the Spastics Society in 1986 and 1990 found that non-disabled candidates were 1·5 times more likely to be offered a job interview than a disabled candidate.

Again, what about the conduct of an employer who imposes unnecessary conditions for a job, such as possessing a driving licence, which adversely affects disabled people more than non-disabled people? Or the case of a successful candidate for a senior civilian post with a police authority who, because of her disability, but with no justification on grounds of special risk, was refused entry to its pension scheme?

If anyone still doubts that hurtful discrimination exists, they need look no further than the Government Benches for a clear endorsement of what I am describing. In this House on 28 March last year, the right hon. Member for Chelsea said that he had,

"no doubt that some employers' recruitment practices discriminate unfairly against people with disabilities."—[*Official Report*, 28 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 1148.]

Later last year, the Secretary of State for Health told a Conferation of British Industry conference on employment and mental health that:

"People who suffer mental illness can find themselves discriminated against. Ancient prejudices are still to be found in the 20th century workplace."

Only last week, again in his Radio 4 interview, the right hon. Member for Chelsea said:

"There exists too much prejudice against disabled people in this country—indeed in most countries in the world—and that leads to unjustified discrimination."

I could go on, but need not do so in view of the wide cross-party agreement now about the unfairness which disabled people meet in Britain today.

There is, however, another element to the unfair discrimination which disabled people experience. It is not confined simply to where their disability is irrelevant, but extends to where it is chosen as the reason to justify different treatment. Too often people find that, because of their disability, society expects them to shoulder an unequal and unfair burden compared with someone without it. Far from having equal access to potential employment, public services, transport, housing and recreational facilities, disabled people are often doubly handicapped by total lack of access.

This is not to say that expensive and sophisticated means are always required to accommodate their needs, since frequently any necessary changes will be straightforward and insignificant in terms both of cost and inconvenience. When I talk to people whose daily lives are restricted in this way, who find their desire for self-determination and independent living needlessly denied, it is not hard to see why they regard society's refusal to remove barriers as unjustified discrimination, more especially where equal access can be accomplished at reasonable expense. Nor is it hard to imagine why people with disabilities now demand the means legally to enforce their right to access and freedom from segregation and exclusion.

As well as arguments on principle, there are pragmatic reasons why we should be legislating for change. In a democratic society, law must inevitably be one of the means for creating the sort of community we want to see and it has a major part to play here as in other policy areas.

Hon. Members have claimed before, and may do so again today, that legal recourse is not needed, that education and exhortation will suffice. Just two days ago, employers were invited by the Prime Minister, when he launched the employers agenda on disability, to change outmoded ways of treating disabled job-seekers or employees which are discriminatory, although the agenda itself apparently made no mention even of the word "discrimination".

While I would not claim that this or any other Bill can be a panacea that alone will change practices and make society more accessible, I am sure that it will do more to aid the process of education and persuasion than anything else that has happened so far. Education is often neither a cheap option nor an effective one, and attempts to persuade which are not founded in fundamental rights set by the law will, in my view, end in failure.

I need only remind the House of the single and simple issue of compulsory seat belt use. It was claimed year after year that public education would suffice. But after more than £7 million had been spent on advertising a message that drivers still declined to hear, Ministers had to concede that legislation was needed even to make drivers change behaviour that endangered their own lives.

To succeed, any educational process requires a sound and rational base. This was one of the reasons for legislating on sex and race discrimination, and the point applies with the same force now to disability. Law which highlights the incidence of inequality faced by disabled people in our society, and ensures that its worst signs are removed, offers such a base.

I think that is why the Employment Select Committee, in its report on employment and disability of December 1990, called on the Government to examine the case for equal opportunities law in the field of employment. It took the view, quite rightly, that no amount of voluntary codes of good practice, or public relations exercises like the lamentable "Two Ticks" scheme, would be sufficient to make many employers recognise the need for justified change to which they were resistant.

There are practical social gains that will result from this Bill for people other than its direct beneficiaries. The greater integration of disabled people into the mainstream of our national life—as workers, consumers or taxpayers—will add to the wealth by reducing their dependence on benefits and increasing the economic contribution that they can make. This is no academic point.

As the Americans with Disabilities Bill was passing through Congress, it was the realisation of this effect which secured the support of the telecommunications industry

for the major changes proposed. The companies in question saw that making their systems more accessible would produce new subscribers.

I referred earlier to the climate for this debate having changed. The 1990s opened with renewed and increasing interest from many quarters in the creation of more and better rights for the individual citizen. That was partly stimulated by what other countries had achieved in terms of citizens' rights.

Sceptics who once argued that legislation like this could not be drafted or, when introduced, would fail, now have to reckon with the fact that America is not by any means the only country to have law that deals with unjustified discrimination against disabled people. Moreover, if it is argued that America's new law will not be fully operational for many years, at least the clock has started ticking there; and the sooner we make a start here, the sooner we shall have social justice for our disabled people.

In any case, the Minister's public comments on the United States legislation, on the BBC and elsewhere, have mistakenly ignored the fact that there was already state law in 46 states, much of it going back years, not to mention the Federal Rehabilitation Act 1973 and the changes which gave a personal right to enforce this in 1978.

The European Commission is interesting itself in this issue. For example, a recent draft directive is concentrating the minds of EC Transport Ministers on the need for domestic laws to redress the discrimination experienced by disabled people and workers on public transport systems as they travel to and from work. To my mind, the tide has long since turned on those who argue that law has no part to play in achieving justice for disabled people and, as many disability organisations now say, the question that we in the United Kingdom face is not whether we shall come to realise this but whether we shall be the last country to do so.

I must now very briefly explain the effects of the more important provisions of the Bill, which applies throughout the United Kingdom. The prohibition of discrimination is achieved by defining in general terms and more specifically the circumstances in which unequal treatment experienced by disabled people will in future be unlawful. It establishes the means by which this will be judged where there is a dispute and creates a disablement commission, modelled on the existing commissions on sex and race, which is intended to contribute to the Bill's effective enforcement. By virtue of its definition on disability, the Bill confers rights also on those treated unfairly because of a past recovered disability or one which is reputed to impair them —for example, a recovered mental patient—whatever may be its actual effect. The rights created by the Bill are not extended to all persons who have a disability, but only to those who are "qualified" as defined by the Bill. This distinction is important since the Bill recognises that some decisions to treat persons differently are fair and proper. Someone with a disability may be unable, for example, to meet an essential requirement for undertaking a job or obtaining a service. The Bill's aim is to limit the occasions when unequal treatment may lawfully occur only to these situations. In relation to employment, a person will be "qualified" when able to perform the essential functions of the job, taking account of any adaptations or alterations to the employer's workplace or organisation which it would be reasonable to introduce. The same approach is taken in relation to the provision of goods and services. A disabled person is qualified under the Bill if able to meet the essential eligibility requirements for receiving them, bearing in mind reasonable changes which could be made to accommodate the effects of their disability. In addition to possible modifications to an organisation or to its physical facilities, the provision of assistance, such as by interpreters, will fall within the scope of reasonable changes which may be envisaged.

The Bill's general definition of discrimination is a familiar one in this field of law. It encompasses not only less favourable treatment of a person with a disability, but also the imposition of apparently neutral conditions or requirements which have a disproportionate and adverse effect for disabled people and which is unfair. Given that the Bill creates duties to ensure reasonable access to employment and to services, a failure or refusal to comply with a duty may be described as a third type of discrimination formulated in the Bill.

In the part dealing with employment, very detailed clauses describe the coverage of the new protections and give particular examples of what will constitute unequal treatment in the workplace. Of course the Bill recognises, as we all must, that deciding to treat a person differently is sometimes going to be justified. To help determine what changes it will be reasonable to require an employer to make so as to accommodate a person's disability, the Bill provides for five factors to be considered, relating to the cost of the adaptations and the nature, scale and financial resources of the employer's concern. This is an important feature of the Bill. Extra costs needed to ensure compliance with its provisions should not be allowed to jeopardise the financial viability of businesses affected. I am confident that the Bill as drafted cannot have this effect.

A similar approach is taken in regard to the provision of goods and services. A general duty to ensure freedom from discrimination and the right to all reasonable access is applied to the provision of public services. Twelve types of service are listed, ranging from public buildings and spaces, through housing, education and transport to the provision of trade or professional services. The new obligations will not require any change that is technically impracticable or unsafe and, again, the test of what is reasonable will be determined by what is achievable without "undue hardship" being caused to the person or body needing to change. To allow time for the planning and introduction of modifications and adaptations, the Secretary of State is given powers to grant specific exemptions from compliance for up to five years to those who will be affected by the new requirements.

As the Bill makes new rights and obligations, their effective enforcement must be provided for. It achieves this in two ways. First, it confirms the right of the individual citizen, aggrieved by discrimination, to bring a civil claim in his or her local court seeking compensation and/or a mandatory order. Secondly, the disablement commission it creates is invested with powers and duties to enable it both to conciliate, where there is a complaint of discrimination, and to take enforcement action if this is necessary.

Hon. Members may recall that one of the objections voiced in the past to legislating in this field is the complexity and difficulty of the laws that would be needed in order to do the job. The Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill leaves little scope for that particular argument to resurface. I believe that all the essential rights and duties

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are fully and effectively described. I have to acknowledge that any draft Bill will be far from perfect. Improvements may be suggested today or at some later date, and I and my co-sponsors of all parties will be glad to receive comments on the Bill. We shall look constructively at any and all amendments that may be proposed.

The Bill is widely supported in the House and by people of all parties, and of none, throughout the country. In particular, it is supported by all the organisations that represent disabled people. For all their help in the work of preparing the Bill, I most warmly thank Peter Mitchell, Ian Bynoe, Pat Healy and others who, while they cannot be named, provided skills of parliamentary draftsmanship as good as any available to the Minister. I speak with some experience of bringing Government legislation to the House.

The Spastics Society recently published a most striking photograph of two baby girls, with the caption:

"One of them has cerebral palsy, the other will grow up with full human rights."

That is what my Bill is all about, and I commend it to the House.

1.2 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who is widely respected for his work in the area of disability. Twenty-two years ago he pioneered the present effective disability legislation, and he has always worked unceasingly in the House on behalf of the disabled. Indeed, his work is recognised not only in this country and in both Houses of Parliament, but in the English speaking world and—as he is too modest to mention—by Commonwealth Governments. He is a pioneer in his area and we salute him for his work.

My intention is to get the Bill on to the statute book, and that can be best achieved by saying as little as possible, as quickly as possible. The Bill has 13 clauses and one schedule, and the right hon. Gentleman dealt with it ably and explicity; there is no time to make any sensible comments, so we shall do that in Committee. I welcome the Bill and, in particular, I welcome the provision for a disablement commission.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to one real need, which I learned about in January this year from the borough of Oadby and Wigston, which is in my constituency. It relates to carers and the council tax. The borough is worried because, although it supports the concept of some form of exemption for carers in the community from the council tax, it feels that the contribution that carers make to the community is measurable in cash terms—that it is possible to assess the savings that are made in hospital and nursing home fees, for instance—although the carers themselves probably take on their responsibilities without regard for such implications.

It is felt that such people should receive some small recompense for their efforts. According to the latest information available to the borough, council tax discounts will be available to certain categories of occupier. Many other councils are equally concerned about this. The discount is expected to be 25 per cent., with a maximum of two persons per household, but the council intends to make representations—which I hope will be noted in the appropriate quarters—to the effect that carers should themselves attract a discount. I agree.

Let me give some examples. A man suffering from Alzheimer's disease is currently exempt from community charge; he is cared for at home by his wife. The latest information suggests that the council tax on their home will be subject to a 25 per cent. discount, as one of only two adults residing at the property was exempt from community charge. The new proposals would increase the discount to 50 per cent.—25 per cent. for each person, carer and previously exempt chargepayer.

A second example—one known to me personally—is the case of a severely physically disabled man who is not exempt from community charge. He is cared for at home by his daughter. Under the current plan, the council tax on their property will attract a 25 per cent. discount, as one of only two adults present in the household is a carer.

Oadby and Wigston council feels that the criteria for discount eligibility should not be restrictive. If they have to be at all restrictive, they should certainly not be as restrictive as those governing who receives the carer premium in benefit cases. We feel that the qualifications are ridiculously strict and unfair. In benefit cases, it is deemed that the carer should be in receipt of invalid care allowance—or would be, but for another benefit that he is already receiving. It is felt that such a criterion would be unduly restrictive for discount purposes, especially as a carer would have to be of working age to qualify for the allowance.

A suggested criterion is the fact that a person needs to spend a good deal of time looking after someone who receives attendance or mobility allowance. I hope that, having given the matter some thought, my right hon. Friend will agree that a more human interpretation of the existing regulations is necessary, for the problems affecting carers are widespread.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe on introducing the Bill. I respect him for what he has struggled to achieve. Every time that he pushes the door open, he finds that further doors are closed on him. All hon. Members wish him every success.

1.9 pm

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The Bill is the sixth attempt to place anti-discrimination legislation on the statute book since the report of the Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People—CORAD—10 years ago. I hope that it will be more successful than previous ones, because disabled people are desperate and determined to have legislation. It is a long time since Harold Macmillan coined the phrase, "Now we can appreciate the wind of change", but there is now a wind of change among disabled people in Britain. They are determined to have legislation, and the sooner that is accepted and recognised by the Government the better.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) used the phase "benevolent neutrality". I hope that we shall hear no nonsense about benevolent neutrality, because it is a euphemism for sitting smiling on the fence when we want active support and participation.

I was delighted that the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) paid tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe. This is a splendid Bill, on

which my right hon. Friend has done much work. It is finely drawn, and he made a comprehensive and eloquent speech. I have heard none better and it deserves the support of both sides of the House.

I hope that there will not be any bickering about the main thrust of the Bill. I echo my right hon. Friend's compliments to Peter Mitchell, Pat Healy and others who helped with its drafting. His fine speech deserves the warm support of both sides of the House and the active support of the Minister.

The essence of the Bill is the creation of new legislative rights rather than charity and patronage. I see no sense in insisting on disabled people pleading for rights that are taken for granted by able-bodied people. The crux of the problem of disablement is not medical but relationships with other people. That is why statutory rights are crucial; without them, disabled people, especially severely disabled people, are disadvantaged.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe clearly said that the Bill provides the nuts and bolts of legislation to protect disabled people. But it does far more than that: it encapsulates in legislation the ideals, aspirations and visions of disabled people throughout the ages. They have not been articulated. We must accept those visions, because they are what disabled people want in their everyday lives.

The Bill helps to provide equal opportunity for disabled people. It gives them a chance to do what they want, rather than what other people think they want. It gives them a chance to do things their way, rather than the way in which other people think they should do them. It gives them a chance to express their individuality, rather than be patronised. It gives them a chance of fulfilling their potential. That is its noble aim. It is in tune with the march of times—its time has come. When it reaches the statute book—under this Government or, more probably, under the incoming Labour Government—disabled people will have full rights of citizenship enshrined in law. They will be able to take their place in society without discrimination and with the same rights as everyone else.

1.14 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): As always, it is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and to hear him support the measure. In passing, I thought that I heard an additional clause being added to the Bill—the rehabilitation of Harold Macmillan through his "winds of change" speech. Perhaps we could encourage that idea among the Opposition.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) in congratulating the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on his good fortune in coming high enough in the ballot to be able to introduce the measure and on his wisdom in selecting it to be debated in the House and then, I hope, in detail in Committee and in another place.

It is not too long—in fact, it is a week—since we discussed another private Member's Bill. That involved traffic calming and one of its aims was to try to reduce the number of people who suffer disabilities as a result of road accidents. About that time there was a lobby in Westminster Hall of people supporting this Bill, many of whom had suffered from the uncalmed traffic of our inner-city streets. Therefore, on recent Fridays we have been considering a seamless robe of legislation. I shall not mention the National Lottery Bill, but that might even be connected.

About 18 months ago I had the good fortune to have a Friday to myself and I chose to debate the subject of people with disabilities. On that occasion the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe was kind enough to support me and to point out that it was the first time in, I think, 10 years that a Back Bencher had initiated such a debate. Many of the right hon. Gentleman's proposals in this Bill flow from the points that I and other hon. Members made during that debate. That is why I have come especially today to support his measure.

I accept that there will be difficulties with the wording of the measure and I fear that there will probably be lengthy though positive and forward-looking discussions in Committee to decide how the Bill can be worded in a practical way to help people with disabilities.

I am especially pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People is with us, as he was on the previous occasion. He, the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, who is the chairman of the all-party committee, have a national and international reputation for supporting people with disabilities. The debate crosses party boundaries and the Floor of the House, as happens when we welcome the measures that my right hon. Friend has been able to introduce and those which the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe has sought and is seeking to introduce.

I mention another international figure whose reputation has perhaps suffered recently, not least in some recent films. I am talking of President Kennedy and of his great inaugural speech—"Ask not what we can do for them". There is something of that sentiment in this measure. However, it is not a question of what we can do for people with disabilities but of what they can do for themselves if we remove some of the obstacles to progress and achievement. That was the theme of my debate and I believe that it is the theme of the Bill.

We represent people of all abilities and disabilities. Above all, we represent those who are less able to come here to represent themselves. Therefore, it is right that we should do what we can for them on occasions such as this.

No doubt there will be considerable debate on the wording, and discussion about how one can legislate against discrimination. It is not an easy question to answer, and I know that the right hon. Gentleman would not pretend that it is. I believe that he seeks to establish in some sort of legislative framework the concept that, all other things being equal, people who have a disability should not be obstructed and prevented from having the same opportunities as other people—whether at a place of work, in a place of entertainment, in their homes, or while using transport.

That is a difficult concept to embody in law. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People will have some thoughts on the subject. We do not seek to do anything absurd. We do not seek to legislate so that people with visual difficulties drive buses, nor to put people whose disabilities would make the handling of certain types of machinery dangerous to themselves or to others into inappropriate situations. We are simply trying to find a form of legal jargon whereby, other things being equal, people with disabilities do not face the obstacle of discrimination.

[Mr. John Bowis]

Those of us who represent inner cities probably see a great many of the obstacles that are placed in the path of people with disabilities. On one of my "Can I help you?" visits in my constituency, I vividly remember finding, quite by chance, a lady in a wheelchair living in the upper of two one-up-one-down flats. Because of her condition she was especially heavy, and because the staircase was so narrow it was difficult for anyone to help her to get downstairs, so most of her life was spent upstairs in a wheelchair, totally dependent on other people bringing in groceries, and providing any sort of company. Having discovered her by chance, I was able to help to resolve the problem, but too many such people in inner cities are in inadequate accommodation. Even if they can get to the front door, it is often not wide enough for a wheelchair, or there is a step down instead of a ramp.

Many people need a little help just to get up in the morning—perhaps because their fingers cannot cope with zips, or they cannot put on their shoes and socks. They need the support of society to enable them to get up, to go out, and to achieve.

I hope that more progress will be made in assessing the needs of people with disabilities, especially physical disabilities. So often in the past—or rather, in comparatively recent years—there have been long delays in the adaptation of someone's house, or the decision on the need for a particular type of wheelchair, while therapists are called in and assessments are passed through social services. People may have to go some distance to the place where wheelchairs are tried out. That can cost money and can make life difficult.

I know that we shall have the opportunity to discuss this another day, but there is also the question whether we can increasingly provide, as of right, powered rather than manual wheelchairs, instead of having to rely on charitable organisations and others to provide them. Progress on all those matters would help. We can begin to look at the needs, and hence the rights.

As one walks about, one becomes aware of people's right not to be obstructed in the street. There may be a problem with the legal standing of the parking space outside someone's home—all too often, such spaces are advisory and not legally binding, so that disabled people cannot park outside their homes. Obstructions may be caused by thoughtless, rather than malicious, people parking their vehicles on pavements. Visually handicapped people may trip over such obstacles—or, indeed, over pavement furniture. People may, without realising it, park across pavement ramps, so that people in wheelchairs who have been out shopping cannot get back on to the pavement in order to get back into their homes. There may be a problem of people parking on bus stops so that the buses cannot park flush to the pavements for people to get on to them.

We may need to encourage the right to more types of public transport, especially buses. In the previous debate, I referred to Omni buses—which was reported as omnibuses, which was not what I had in mind. Such buses kneel down so that wheelchairs can get on board. Such services could be improved and I hope that the Bill will help in that. I hope that the Bill will also help with the rights to a reliable service from taxicard users. There are also the rights for dial-a-ride users to have a bigger say in the service provided by that organisation.

The Bill rightly concentrates on employment and then on the provision of services. The definition of "a qualified person with a disability" in both parts of the Bill is good and worthy of consideration.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe talked about quotas. I have previously advocated the stricter enforcement of quotas. Since then, I have talked to more people who have said, "Be careful. Don't forget that an awful lot of people with a disability do not want to be labelled as such and may not come forward to claim their place in the queue for the quotas." Quotas may not be the whole answer, although I am sure that they are part of it.

Access to employment in every sense is important, whether it is the availability of the job or the availability of the entrance to the building where the job is. The Bill should help with that. The Bill will also help with promotion. There are too many places, including civil service Departments, in which if one has a particular type of disability, one cannot work above a certain floor because of, for example, fire regulations. The regulations should not be changed in terms of public safety, but the opportunities should be changed so that people who are promoted do not have to work above such a floor. It is a straightforward question of attitude rejigging.

Training is clearly important and we need to work with the training and enterprise council system to ensure that adequate training comes through. Above all, we need to educate the public and employers to have the patience to enable someone with a particular disability, such as a learning difficulty, to get into a job and then to establish him or herself there. All too often, patience runs out and then the job runs out for the individual.

The Bill also refers to education. One of the great desires of my life is that people should have the opportunity for education to continue throughout their lives, from the nursery through to adult education for the retired. I want more such education and I want to ensure that people with disabilities can also benefit from increasing opportunities. It is not merely a matter of the child's access to the school or of the special school for the special need. It is also a matter of thinking about the parents who want to come to support the child in school. Parents may have a disability and all too often they are excluded from coming to support their children.

I refer, merely in headings, for the need to provide opportunities in the arts. There is also the question of people with mental illness coming into the community. My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough rightly referred to carers. The rights of people with disabilities are connected to the provisions for the carers who help them. All that is important.

The Bill will go further to assist people with disabilities. Above all, it will help to educate the able-bodied and the able-minded to look after the interests to a greater extent of the people who need our help as desperately as those whom the Bill is intended to support.

1.28 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I too am very glad to support the Bill and to congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on his good fortune in coming high in the ballot and on

introducing such a worthwhile Bill. As the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) mentioned, there have been several attempts over a number of years to get such legislation on to the statute book. My goodness, the time is ripe. I hope that the Minister will be more forthcoming and more positive than he has been on some television programmes recently in commenting on the Bill.

Of course we could nit-pick and find forms of words in the Bill that may require improvement, but the question is whether we are behind the principle. That principle is one that has already been enshrined in statute in respect of racial and sex discrimination. I have not heard the Minister or his colleagues advocating that we should do away with that legislation so presumably—despite the difficulties experienced in passing it—the right hon. Gentleman accepts that it has been worth while and that it is doing a good job. The same must surely be the case with the present Bill.

If there is such a thing as discrimination against disabled people—I do not think that the Minister would dissent from the assertion that there is—and if there is a problem, on what possible basis can we shy away from enacting legislation parallel to that passed to deal with racial and sex discrimination? None of us pretends that passing legislation is a panacea, but at least legislation lays down ground rules, sets standards and reminds people what a civilised society expects of them. That should be as true of disability as it is of the other issues.

All of us are aware of examples of discrimination against disabled people. The recent publication "Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination—A Case for Anti-Discrimination Legislation", funded and supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, underlines the needs. Despite legislation to encourage integrated schools, in 1989 the number of children in special schools was only marginally down on the 1977 figure—from 1·41 per cent. to 1·35 per cent. That means that relatively little progress has been made.

The work also showed that disabled people are three times more likely to be out of work and unemployed for longer periods than non-disabled people—and that is according to figures published by the Government themselves. When disabled people do find jobs, they are usually more poorly paid. Some 63 per cent. of disabled people earn less than £200 a week, compared with 35 per cent. of non-disabled people. We have heard examples today of how the benefits system itself is working against disabled people. Moreover, although we have more than 4 million people with disabilities and motor-related impairments, only some 80,000 houses have been adapted and made accessible to disabled people.

In all those areas, there are examples of discrimination. Some may not be deliberate. Some may be accidents, arising from the fact that people simply have not thought at the right time. But some—in the world of employment—may arise from a positive prejudice out of which people have not been educated. The passage of the Bill would up the argument and make employers think twice before ruling out disabled people purely on the basis of prejudice.

Last week, a good example of the existence of day-to-day discrimination came to my attention. We had a launch meeting of the excellent work undertaken by Mencap in its study of the leisure needs of profoundly and multiply disabled people. I was fortunate enough to chair that launch, and we heard speakers such as Lord Rix whom we welcome to the other place and congratulate on his role in the work for disabled people.

Three young profoundly deaf disabled people came down from Manchester for the launch. They had intended to travel down together on the train. Unfortunately, however, British Rail could accommodate only one of the wheelchairs and had facilities for only one at a time so they had to travel on three separate trains. We hear much about the Government's proposed citizens charter. But all the citizens charters in the world, and everything that we say here, will not get that sort of thing put right. We need more than that, and that is why we need the Bill.

I urge the Minister to respond positively. I urge him to say that whatever difficulties may arise with the wording, they can be dealt with in Committee and in another place. If parts of the Bill need to be redrafted, let us consider that positively and not use it as a reason for not making progress. If a general election is called before the Bill reaches the statute book and if the Minister's Government are returned, I urge him to say that they will be predisposed to finding a way to ensure that the Bill reaches the statute book.

Pious hopes for good practice are not enough. It behoves us to pass legislation in this area of discrimination, as in other areas. This Bill is the opportunity and I urge the House not to let that opportunity pass.

1.34 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on introducing the Bill. I am here to support the Bill today because there is a Scottish Bill on the Order Paper later. I do not apologise for that; it is my principal reason for not being in Scotland on a Friday.

I was reminded by people who were visiting Parliament to lobby on behalf of the disabled that I had spent some time in a wheelchair. I had forgotten about that because one tends to forget past difficulties. I had the misfortune to hit the ground rather hard in one of Her Majesty's flying machines. I spent some months in hospital and many months in a wheelchair as a result.

Being a Member of this place is one of the few jobs in which there is no discrimination against disability. The only requirement is to become elected. I fought the election at which I was elected to this place from a wheelchair and I became aware of the problems facing people who must go around in wheelchairs. It was most vividly demonstrated at the count when one must mount the platform at the local town hall to hear the announcement. There were no facilities to allow someone in a wheelchair to mount the platform. I had go get out of my wheelchair against the advice of the RAF doctors who had been looking after me. They had made it clear that I should not do that. However, I had to get out of my wheelchair to be in place for the count. As the count was successful, I was happy to do that. That experience clearly showed me that there are problems.

Prior to becoming a Member of Parliament I was a chief executive of a stores group. We had a definite and positive policy of employing disabled people. As everyone is aware, there is legislation requiring employers to employ a percentage of disabled people.

[Mr. Bill Walker]

We had a positive policy which was largely of my initiation. However, we rarely achieved the required numbers for different reasons. We were unable to offer the kind of jobs that disabled people could do. Also, many disabled people do not wish to be registered as such. We employed people whom we knew would qualify as registered disabled which would have helped our figures and statistics. However, those people did not wish to be registered as such.

As I have said, I am in favour of the Bill. I recognise that, as with all Bills, Government and draftsmen will always tell us what is wrong with them. Having introduced several private Members' Bills of my own, I understand the difficulties. However, that does not change the principle. As an enlightened humane society, we should be considering ways of removing obstacles.

I remind the House that I was still confined to a wheelchair on the day that I arrived in the House. I understand the problems that that can present. I was back in hospital for many months after the election. When I was finally released and came to this place, I had to carry around a metal support. That presented problems as well.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): The Bill brings to mind the fact that most of the House is completely inaccessible to someone in a wheelchair. It is virtually impossible for me to employ a secretary, for example, who is in a wheelchair because of all the stairs in the House and the absence of wheelchair-available lifts. We should start by putting our own house in order.

Mr. Walker: My hon. Friend has saved me from making the very point to which I was leading. We should set an example, but we frequently do not, and that has been demonstrated by the way in which we employed our secretaries and various other people. One must know whether one can get a wheelchair into a lift in this building. One had to carry out considerable research to find out which lifts to use. My wife was the expert, I am pleased to say—she found out for me. There is a great need for people to be made aware of the problems.

I am a great believer in lobbying. Our democracy would fail to function if people did not lobby. However, one must be very careful when one lobbies. The other day, I was desperately trying to give television and radio performances—I think that that is the best way to describe them; others might say "appearances"—on problems relating to Scottish constitutional matters. As I was charging in and out of the building, as we all must do from time to time, I found to my horror that my way was barred by a row of wheelchairs. People were determined that I would not get in. I asked, "Don't you realise that I'm on your side and that I can be of good to you only if I am in there?" Anyone who lobbies must not assume that all Members of Parliament are necessarily hostile to their views. Also, they must recognise that Members of Parliament can express their views only if they are actually in Parliament. That was an example of mistaken lobbying, and I hope that that has been drawn to their attention.

It is always difficult to find legislative words to put into practice what is positive discrimination. There is always the possibility of discriminating against others, but that should not inhibit one from attempting to legislate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on their distinguished record in the House and elsewhere in supporting the cause of the disabled.

1.42 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on choosing this subject for his Bill. It is important and long overdue. At the heart of trying to get rid of discrimination in society lies the desire of the majority of us, if not all hon. Members, to achieve equal opportunity for every member of society. I shall limit my comments to two or three minutes, because we need to come to a conclusion on the discussion.

It is shame on the Government that they have not seen fit to implement sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986, which would have given representation and opportunities for advocacy to all disabled people. It is to the shame and discredit of the Government that they have not taken a firmer line with companies and local authorities that have gone no way toward the quota of 3 per cent. employment of disabled people. It is also to the shame and discredit of the Government that, in their own training programmes —for example, employment training and youth training —in the past three years we have seen successive reductions in the number of people with disabilities enjoying participation. If they doubt that—they appear to doubt it—they should look at the answers to my questions on that subject last year.

The Bill will bring about the reversal of all that the Government have sought to do, because the Government have not implemented help for disabled people for many years. They have not given the problem the priority that they should have given it.

The Bill is not just about access to buildings, although that is important. It is about access to participation in our society. It involves equal access to pensions, health care, entertainments and the whole range of services and activities which people without disability enjoy. The Bill is not just about parking vehicles; it is about full participation.

There was reference earlier to the council tax. I regret that the Government have not done more for disabled people and their carers. Government support was lacking when they had the opportunity to press the House to help those with disabilities and their carers.

The Bill is about rights; it is not about concessions or what we do for other people. It is about how we enable all people to participate fully in our society. That aim is demonstrated in the make-up of the disablement commission referred to at the back of the Bill. It is proposed that at least three quarters of the people who serve on that commission should have a disability. Only those people with a disability understand what it is like. The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe has shown that he fully understands what society needs to help disabled people play their full part.

I have not spoken for long and I hope that other hon. Members will follow that pattern to ensure that the Bill makes progress today. It is long overdue.

1.45 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I shall make my intervention now, but I do not seek to bring the debate to a close as I know that other hon. Members wish to contribute. I have listened to the six right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken today.

To my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) I say that the Local Government Finance Bill is before the House, and representatives of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation have made representations to the Department of the Environment, which is currently considering them. We shall look forward to what emerges from that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) will understand that the assessment of the needs of disabled people and the provisions for community care from April 1993 will depend very much on individual assessments of the needs of disabled and elderly people and the production of packages of care to meet those needs.

I listened to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr Ashley), the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and heard the strength of feeling on the subject. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on finding a slot to enable us to discuss the Bill today. There has been all-party support for the Bill in today's discussions and sponsorship of the Bill crosses party lines. The House has a long and splendid tradition of cross-party interest in disabled people are meeting their needs. The all-party disablement group plays a notable part in keeping up pressure on whoever holds my post. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and the staff of the all-party group for the dedicated assiduity with which they pursue the promotion of the interests of disabled people in our society. It is four and a half years since I returned from Ireland to take up my present responsibilities and it has been an immense privilege to be able to spend so much of my time and effort on behalf of disabled people. I believe that we have made progress.

There is much common ground between the parties in the House. We all know that there is still too much unjustified discrimination against disabled people. We know that that is wrong and often has a cruel impact on the quality of life of disabled people. It is also remarkably stupid, because the wealth of ability and talent that disabled people have to offer—a variety of enterprise in society—is significant, and it is a waste of those talents if they suffer unjustifiable discrimination.

I hope that I carry the whole House with me when I say that we need to reduce, if we cannot totally eliminate, such unfair discrimination, that we wish to develop approaches in society to raise awareness and educate employers and others about meeting the needs of disabled people so that we can avoid the prejudice that leads to discrimination against disabled people, and that we want disabled people to achieve the independence and integration in the whole of society that they demand and enable them to assert control over their own lives.

I have been particularly impressed by the gathering pace during the time I have had my present responsibilities and the determination of disabled people to control their own lives and no longer just quietly to accept what they are told is good for them. They are anxious to say, "This is what we want. It is your duty to give it to us." Our final aim—again, I believe that I carry the whole House with me—must be to enable those who can and wish to work to do so.

The past few years have seen considerable and fundamental improvements in the situation facing disabled people. I do not deny that a great deal remains to be done. I have noticed attitudes towards disabled people changing, as well as changes in the attitude of disabled people towards their situation. Disabled people do not just want sympathy. They do not want to be patronised or to be looked-after people or people who are told what is good for them. Nor, if my postbag is anything to go by, do they believe that any solution that is worth having to their problems will be like waving a magic wand so that all those problems are solved at once.

Nor is there by any means unanimity in the disabled community, let alone among others in society, that legislation is necessarily the right way at this time to carry that work forward. That, in essence, is the point on which the House must decide today—whether to opt for the legislative route now or, at least for a while longer, continue with the other approach, without ruling out legislation if the alternative is shown to be inadequate.

As I say, I have listened to the strength of argument in the debate and will continue to listen to further contributions. I remain unrepentantly and benevolently neutral in my attitude and, if the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South calls that sitting on the fence, then in essence it probably is, for there are arguments both ways.

I am influenced, too, to some extent by the fact of the prospective life left to this Parliament. I shall come shortly to some of the deficiencies in the drafting of the Bill. I appreciate that a good long Committee stage might sort out some of those difficulties, but somehow I doubt whether we shall have an opportunity to do that, though that is not within my control.

It will have been useful to have had this considerable in-depth discussion of the issues. I appreciate that it will come as a disappointment to many, inside and outside the House, to hear that I cannot go further today. I respect people such as Peter Large, John Wilson, Lord Rix and Lord Snowdon, all good friends of mine, who have been pressing on me the case for this legislation. I have no doubt that I may also be upsetting a young four-legged lady named Quella, who I understand may also be present during the debate.

I hope that in reaching a decision, the House will be prepared to bear in mind a number of factors outside those put forward by the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe and others in the debate. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman, Peter Mitchell and others who have worked on the Bill. I recognise that any faults it has might be suitable for amendment in Committee, but I put two points now to the right hon. Gentleman, because, if I am right in my assessment of the situation, this will not be the last time that the House discusses these matters.

First, I am surprised that the county court is envisaged as the appropriate forum for employment matters. I should have thought that such work would be more useful for an industrial tribunal to undertake, rather than a county court. Even if we involved a court, I am not sure

[Mr. Nicholas Scott]

that the county court would be the right place. The powers of the High Court to grant remedies are more powerful than those of county courts. I hope that that matter can be taken into account.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I took a close interest in both the race relations and sex discrimination legislation when they went through the House. It strikes me that in his Bill the requirement on an alleged discriminator to show that a requirement is reasonable is a less stringent test than that which exists in the sex and race discrimination legislation, where it must be shown to be justifiable. The right hon. Gentleman will be well aware that recent case law shows a strict interpretation of that justifiable requirement.

Mr. Alfred Morris: May I emphasise that we are open to all suggestions for improving the Bill? The essential point is that disabled people should have legal recourse if they are unfairly or unjustifiably discriminated against. It is that principle which is important.

Mr. Scott: I understand that. If we eventually decide to follow the legislative route, I am anxious not to create a bean feast for lawyers or a legal nightmare—the two are probably one and the same—but to ensure that the legislation is clear and easily understood.

It is often thought that Britain compares unfavourably with other European Community member states, countries across the Atlantic and elsewhere in its treatment of disabled people. In recent months I have visited France more than once and Germany. I am impressed by some steps taken there, but, generally, I have the impression that they are envious of many of our provisions for disabled people, not least for them to live independently. Although we can learn lessons from Scandinavian countries, Germany, France and, no doubt, the United States to improve our provision, I am certainly not convinced that we are lagging behind them in terms of general provision for disabled people.

Last November when I addressed the first meeting of Council of Europe Ministers for Disabled People and listened to the speeches in Paris, it was clear that our European partners were envious of much of our provision. Sweden, although not an EC country, is often mentioned in this regard. It is interesting that even before the change of Government, Sweden had chosen not anti-discrimination legislation, but to tackle the problems as we have been trying to do: by identifying particular problems facing disabled people and finding the resources to overcome them. For example, Sweden talks about the accessibility of transport to disabled people. The approach there is to provide special transport, not to integrate them into the provision of transport across the board.

It is acknowledged that it is early days for the Americans with Disability Act. The President made a proud declaration when he signed the Bill. I well understand that and I do not underestimate the importance of declaratory legislation in changing attitudes. Certainly I have that factor in mind in considering an approach to this Bill and, no doubt, subsequent initiatives in this area. The employment provisions of that legislation do not come into effect until July. Another reason for postponing a decision today is to see how those provisions work in the United States before coming to a clear conclusion about them. What is clear is that the federal Government of the United States are putting no federal resources towards implementing their Act. America has a much more litigious society than Britain, so perhaps the federal Government will take other action to ensure that the Act is implemented in due course.

The right hon. Gentleman said that we were behind a number of other countries in our anti-discriminatory legislation. I accept that we have not introduced legislation similar to that in several other countries, but I do not believe that we are behind in our overall provision for disabled people. We have a good record on what I would call—although not in any derogatory sense—piecemeal legislation for disabled people in our society. The most recent improvement in the building regulations has been a big step in ensuring that people with wheelchairs or sensory impairments have access to public buildings. We have also introduced legislation dealing with transport, community care, education and social security benefits, and we have greatly encouraged employers to move forward in this important area.

As the Government take action in those separate areas, they combine to raise awareness in the community about the issues of disability. There will be a particular opportunity to do that in the coming weeks when we launch the two new disability benefits—the disability living allowance and the disability working allowance. The widespread advertising campaigns in the press, on television and through the BBC select system will inevitably raise awareness of the needs of disabled people, not just among the disabled community, but in society in general. That will be a tremendous impetus to our progress in meeting the needs of the disabled.

I do not want to spend a great deal of time talking about the two new benefits, but those concerned with disability issues have welcomed a number of their features —not least the move away from medical examination to self-assessment. The widespread promotion of the new benefits and the introduction of the benefits inquiry line, and so on, have also been welcomed. The two new benefits are in addition to the steady incremental progress that has been made over the past 10 years in meeting the needs of disabled people through the benefits system.

Other initiatives, such as the national provision of a telephone exchange for the deaf, have made significant improvements for the deaf and the hard of hearing in the community. On employment, there are training and special schemes, such as sheltered employment and sheltered placements, which also make a significant contribution towards enabling disabled people to get into employment. The new disability symbol, which was adopted by the Department of Employment in 1990, and is now increasingly used by employers as a sign of their commitment to meeting the employment needs of disabled people, is another step in the right direction.

I mentioned building regulations, which currently apply to commercial and public buildings. I am delighted to note that my colleagues in the Department of Employment have announced their intention to consider the accessibility of domestic buildings. In my view—and it is a personal, not a Government, view at the moment—we should ensure that all new houses are built so that they are properly accessible to disabled people. That would be a minimal cost compared with the cost of adaptation at some later stage.

We have a long way to go with transport—buses, trains and tubes. However, anyone who considers the matter fairly and with an open mind will recognise that we are making substantial progress. Taxis in London are becoming more accessible—4,000 are wheelchair accessible—and another 60 local authorities are following London's lead in insisting that all new taxis are wheelchair accessible.

It is easy to understate our progress in a number of different areas. People may complain that we have progressed on a piecemeal basis rather than waving a magic wand and imagining that everything would be all right when certain legislation reached the statute book——

Mr. Ashley: I am surprised at the line that the Minister is taking. Why cannot such progress be an addition to, rather than a substitute for, the granting of new legislative rights for disabled people?

Mr. Scott: I tried to explain that earlier, when I mentioned the doubts that are felt. There is a lack of unanimity within the disabled community, as well as outside. I was struck by the latest initiative launched the other night by the Employers Forum on Disability, in the presence of the Prime Minister. A number of employers start out with the utmost good will, firmly committed to employing disabled people, but the forum seemed to feel —employers representing more than 1 million people were present—that legislating was not the best way in which to encourage their employment. I do not wish to rule out legislation, but I feel that, for the time being, it is best simply to continue to encourage, educate and increase awareness.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My right hon. Friend mentioned taxis. Many taxi drivers live in my constituency, and they consider the cost of the new taxis—over £20,000—prohibitive. A couple of days ago, a newspaper report suggested that the new taxis might no longer be required. Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the matter?

Mr. Scott: I am responsible for disabled people rather than taxi drivers. I was delighted to learn that, in London and 60 other areas, all new taxis must be wheelchair-accessible, and that London Regional Transport is considering the introduction of "low-level entry" buses. I did not know that taxi drivers were worried, but I put the interests of disabled people first, and I am very pleased with the progress that has been made.

Further progress is in sight: attitudes are changing. The other night, the employers' forum presented a 10-point plan. I shall not go into the details, but I urge hon. Members to read the agenda carefully. It could give a substantial boost to the employment of disabled people.

Companies that sign up for the plan will commit themselves to making the employment of disabled people an integral part of all their equal opportunities policies and practices. The agenda mentions the need to target recruiting staff, and to ensure that they are aware of the potential of disabled people and can bring that knowledge to bear on the selection process. Companies must see that, once employed, disabled people are not simply forgotten, but are considered for promotion; they must ensure that those who become disabled when already working for a company are not dismissed, but are given the proper training and rehabilitation to enable them to return to work. Companies must recognise and respond to disabled people—not just as employees, but as customers, suppliers, shareholders and members of the community as a whole.

The Bill is an important step in the right direction. The House, rightly, is giving careful consideration to its principles within the limited time that is available. I hope that it will help to view the Bill in the context of some of what I have said today. There is no difference of opinion in the House about the ends that we seek: the integration of disabled people, their independence and their participation in a range of activities, including employment, the securing of proper housing, recreation and sport. Above all, we want them to have control over their own lives.

Where we differ is whether we should proceed with the Bill or give the voluntary approach a further chance to prove that it can work. It is a fine balance, but I just favour the second approach. We want to encourage education and to raise awareness. I understand that some will be disappointed about that. In the longer term, I do not rule out a return to the legislative approach if the approach that I am commending to the House does not work.

Finally, may I say with all possible passion that disabled people are not a race apart from the rest of society. They are of us and we are of them, and we owe them a duty to ensure that unfair discrimination is reduced and eventually, we hope, eliminated. Our common humanity, whether we are able or disabled, should transcend the differences between us.

I say to people who are still blinkered to the potential contribution of disabled people to our society, "Recognise and utilise that potential on behalf of your enterprises, whatever they may be."

I should prefer to achieve the ends of the Bill by such awareness, enlightenment and what I call enlightened self-interest. If that is not possible, no doubt a future Parliament will wish to return to the matter again.

2.10 pm

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Labour Members believe that the voluntary approach has been tried and found wanting. We believe that the time has come for legislation. We warmly welcome the Bill and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and the sponsors of the Bill on its introduction.

The "benevolent neutrality" of the Government amounts to the kiss of death. The Minister's speech has been the kiss of Caiaphas. It is not good enough to say that the Bill is welcome and at the same time indicate, by everything that is said and done in the Chamber, an intention to talk it out.

I shall be brief so that we can hear the speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster) and for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar), who, in their short time in the House, have championed the cause of disabled people here and in their constituencies.

It is right to support a Bill that enables and empowers those who suffer from disabilities. We believe—I am happy to give the weight of the Opposition Front Bench to the proposition—that those who suffer from disability and who experience handicap have an enormous contribution to make to the wealth and welfare of our country. We want

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

to see the Bill on the statute book because it will break some of the chains that inhibit them from doing so—chains which are not of their making but which all too often result from our—able-bodied people's—attitudes and lack of experience of disability or handicap.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) said, we have a responsibility to recognise that the winds of change are blowing through this country. It is important to ensure that we open the House to that call for change. Disabled people have found that the voluntary approach is not working. All the disabled people who came to the House to lobby us told us that enough is enough and that they want us to act now. Labour will act. We expect the Government to give the Bill a fair wind. If they do not, we shall do so when we take office after the next election.

2.13 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): I rise briefly to congratulate the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on introducing the Bill. It is a good measure to bring before the House. I believe that it should be explored in Committee, where its disadvantages can be put more forcefully by the Government.

I am president of the Winchester group for the disabled. Not long ago, we had an awareness day when we had a fleet of wheelchairs and a circuit around Winchester. Any member of the public could sit in a wheelchair half way around the circuit and then change over and push. That exercise brought vividly to people's attention the fact that major physical obstacles still exist in terms of mobility even around a city as small as Winchester.

Clearly, there is a lot to be done. Much has been done but there is still much to do. The big question is whether we should legislate. On balance I agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. There is a great danger that legislation will create a discrimination which does not exist now—people may be more unwilling to take on invalided people.

In a village in a former part of my constituency—before the boundaries were changed—a firm employed a staff comprising 50 per cent. disabled people. Of course, it was run on a voluntary basis or, at least, its top management was. It ran into the problem of being a one-product company and during the big retrenchments of 1980, it very nearly went out of business because of an over concentration upon the subject of disablement. I have to thank the Government and especially the Ministry of Defence for keeping it in business.

If we were to legislate we could create risks which would work against the employment interests of disabled and severely disabled people. I believe that the Government have got it right, but I shall vote for the Bill to reach its Committee stage so that it can be examined further.

2.15 pm

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): I have come prepared with much to say because I feel passionately about the issue of disability. However, I am beginning to get suspicious about what is happening. The Bill is about the dignity of disabled people—"dignity" is the most important word. If what I suspect is happening is in fact happening, it is not very dignified. I shall not waste the House's time.

That we should get the Bill to its next stage is far more important than anything that I have to say, but I tell Conservative hon. Members that if this Bill is important, this should be its day. If this is not its day, its day will come.

2.16 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): I understand some of the comments that have been made about the need for legislation, but, like the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), I do not share the view that it is needed at this stage. Comments have been made about changes in legislation but also about changes in attitude.

I first came to the House in 1983 and soon afterwards I raised the question of lift operators in the House. I received a very condescending letter which said that the House had to continue to employ lift operators because it had to employ a reasonable number of disabled people. That letter displayed the attitude of people in this House—that such jobs were acceptable for disabled people. I do not and did not take that view. I almost went through the roof at that reaction.

Several hon. Members have commented on the accessibility of the House. Just over a year ago, I sponsored an HTV function for a telethon for severely handicapped people. The difficulties that we faced in getting individuals into and around the House were enormous, but we received the co-operation of all the staff. Every group—security staff, police, the Clerks, administrators and the cafeteria staff—went out of their way to provide us with assistance. However, having said that, I do not believe that we have made anywhere near as much progress as we should have in changing the attitudes within the House itself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) said that when he first came to the House he was in a wheelchair. I do not know whether other hon. Members——

Several Hon. Members *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hayward: I see that a number of hon. Members are nodding and saying that some previously had wheelchairs. The general facilities for wheelchairs, blind people and so on in this building are appalling. An example has been set by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) and others, including the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), who has shown great determination over the years, and great authority on this issue. Such people have been able to push the barriers backwards.

May I cite the sort of difficulties——

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): I know that the hon. Gentleman is knowledgeable on the subject. Will he ensure speedy progress for the Bill, and not talk it out?

Mr. Hayward: I have already clearly given my views on the Bill, as has my right hon. Friend the Minister—*[Interruption.]* I intend to make my comments in terms of my own personal experiences——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is the hon. Gentleman talking the Bill out?

Mr. Hayward: I am not going to talk it out; I am going to make my views known.

Comments have also been made by my right hon. Friend the Minister and others about the general views of people outside the House, to which I should respond. Several hon. Members have said that dramatic progress has been made with regard to people's attitudes. That is true, but I still despair of the public when I see how they fill parking bays and block access to parking spaces clearly designated as reserved for the disabled.

In my constituency the parking bays reserved for the disabled, behind the shops, are regularly filled by cars without the appropriate parking sticker. Downstairs from the Chamber, in Strangers Court, how many of the cars do not have a disabled person's parking sticker? How many supermarket parking bays are filled by cars without those stickers? Those are examples of people's attitudes. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) spoke of the parking problems in his constituency, whereby access for disabled people is blocked. People are thoughtless beyond belief at times.

The Bill deals primarily with employment, but covers other areas too. As a former personnel manager, I spent a long time trying to get people to accept not only the disabled, but women and people from the ethnic minorities. I am only too conscious of the changes now taking place in people's attitudes. Many hon. Members have referred to the efforts of the Prime Minister and others to change attitudes over employment. I believe that those efforts are working. The Government regulations on Department of Employment schemes and the like make it clear that there is a requirement to acknowledge that people with disabilities face problems, and that they should be catered for in the schemes.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Although the hon. Gentleman has to make his case, is he aware that the Bill is necessary for hundreds of thousands of disabled people in Britain? The Opposition want a guarantee that he will finish his speech well before half-past two, so that the Bill will have a proper passage in the last entrails of the Government. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not talk it out. If he does, hundreds of thousands of disabled people will suffer as a result of his intransigence.

Mr. Hayward: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has just come into the Chamber, after a debate —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover and several of his hon. Friends have just walked into the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bolsover has not been present at any point in the debate.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): He is a better attender than the hon. Gentleman is.

Mr. Hayward: Am I to be allowed to make my comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The hon. Member for Bolsover was not present at the start of the debate at 12.33 pm.

Mr. Skinner: I am here now.

Mr. Hayward: The hon. Gentleman was not present to hear the comments of the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe. He has not been present at any earlier point in the debate. He now complains that I should take the opportunity to comment on a speech in which I have a keen interest. He has continued to talk during my comments and I do not intend to give way to him. I have made clear my view in relation to the need for legislation. On a number of occasions, in the Chamber and in Committee, I have made my position clear. If the hon. Member for Bolsover does not know now, he should read the record.

The hon. Member for Bolsover should be aware that seven years ago this month, I was diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis. I am, therefore, more conscious than most hon. Members of the problems faced by disabled people. It is on the basis of that experience that I have come to the conclusion that legislation would not be appropriate at this stage. I said that earlier and I repeat it for the benefit of the hon. Member for Bolsover, who has just walked in.

Legislation is not required at this stage and I believe that not only because of my own personal experience, but because of my experience as an employer. Reference has been made to the quota system and to the green card. The green card system has not worked over decades. Exemptions have been sought and employers have found ways round it, disregarded it and abused it. It was well-intentioned legislation. I now look for a change in attitude in society as a whole which should be achieved and should continue to be pressed for without legislation. In terms of the changes, for example, in relation to transport——

Mr. Ashley: The hon. Gentleman does not accept the Bill. Will he at least sit down and give it a chance to go to Committee?

Mr. Hayward: The Minister's comments in relation to the willingness of hon. Members of all parties to continue to press for changes in terms of improved employment, access in transport and benefit provision show the appropriate avenue to pursue. There are substantial deficiencies and difficulties associated with the Bill. It is important that we debate these issues on the Floor of the House, but, as my right hon. Friend has said, there are difficulties associated with the timing. We should recognise the position in relation to the election. My right hon. Friend's comments are right. We can consider the position and change it in terms of process and pressure. There is no need at this stage to introduce legislation.

The right hon. Member for Wythenshawe said that substantial limits and difficulties were faced in defining disability.

Mr. Wigley: Tory discrimination.

Mr. Hayward: That is not——

Mr. Alfred Morris: I beg to move, That the Question be now put.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I must inform the hon. Gentleman that I cannot accept his request. Mr. Hayward.

Mr. Hayward *rose*——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Hayward: During my speech, I have accepted interventions, both sedentary and from hon. Members on their feet—in particular, from the right hon. Members for Wythenshawe and for Stoke-on-Trent, South and from the

[Mr. Hayward]

hon. Member for Bolsover. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame; sit down."] I have tried to make a series of comments—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sit down."] I have tried——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 21 February.

Mr. Alfred Morris: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance? Does it not detract from the reputation of the House, and is it not demeaning of this House, for us to be refused the opportunity even to make a decision in principle about this important matter, when all hon. Members present, but one, have made it quite clear that they are prepared to allow the Bill to proceed to Committee? Is it not utterly disgraceful?

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me deal with one point at a time. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) has made comments, which he is perfectly entitled to do, but he has not raised a point of order for the occupant of the Chair. It is the job of the occupant of the Chair at 2.30 pm on a Friday—and on other occasions—if the debate is still proceeding, to ask what day it is to be resumed. That is the normal procedure and it is the procedure that has been followed today.

Mr. John Browne: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) won a place in the ballot and was privileged to have his Bill discussed in the House, does not it seem ridiculous that the Bill can be talked out and prevented from entering Committee? Surely, any such action should be taken in Committee or on Report, and the Bill should be allowed a further airing.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You heard the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) say in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar), that he would not talk the Bill out. That was a solemn undertaking given to this House of Commons on this day. You have seen the hon. Member for Kingswood break his word, act dishonourably and destroy the Bill. Does not that require some statement from the Chair?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that we are following the normal procedures of the House, and that it is my duty, as the occupant of the Chair, to ensure that they are carried out.

Mr. Ashley: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has misled the House. He said clearly that his attitude to the Bill was one of benevolent neutrality, yet the Government have organised the torpedoing of a Bill that is vital to disabled people. That is shocking and disgraceful, and the Minister should apologise to the House.

Mr. Wigley: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was quite clear—unless there was a conspiracy by the Conservative Whips—that only one hon. Member sought to delay the passage of the Bill, and that hon. Gentleman said he did not want to talk the Bill out. In those circumstances, did you not have discretion to put the Question? If you did not, and if those on the Government Front Bench knew that, is not it patently clear that, throughout the morning, there has been organised filibustering to enable the Bill to be talked out and the Conservative party to go into the election as the party which wants to perpetuate discrimination against disabled people? The people of these islands understand that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we cannot continue the debate now. However, I will take points of order so long as they are genuine points of order.

Mr. Arbuthnot: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Some quite unjustified slurs have been made about my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward). My hon. Friend said that he intended not to talk the Bill out, but to make his points. He was prevented from doing that by constant barracking and interruptions from Opposition Members. The longest speech in the debate was made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). His speech was longer than that of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People. It was also longer than the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) when he moved his Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc. Bill. Any suggestion that the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill has been talked out by Conservative Members is political posturing and nonsense.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will recall that the Opposition spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) spoke for a couple of minutes. The Minister spoke for about 25 minutes. Other Opposition Members spoke for only a minute or so to allow the Bill to make progress. The Liberal Democrat representative stood up, supported the Bill, and sat down. It should have crossed your mind, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the request for a closure was made, that you knew that the view of the House in general was that the Bill should be given its Second Reading. It is clear that Tory Members have talked the Bill out. It has been said over the years that the Tory party is the party of organised hypocrisy and it has proved that again today by attacking disabled people around Britain. However, the electorate will have the final say.

Mr. Bill Walker: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How can Conservative Members be protected from such unwarranted charges? I promised people in wheelchairs that I would speak in the debate today and that I would support the Bill. I did just that and I find it offensive when people who did not attend the debate make such charges.

Mr. McMaster: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shortened my speech although I had much to say. I cut my speech to a minute or less to ensure the swift passage of the Bill.

In the earlier debate on the Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc. Bill I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and asked whether he would be brief so that we could reach the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill and I received that assurance. What has happened is a disgrace to the House and to the 6·5 million disabled people, their

carers and families. I can tell everyone who participated in that disgraceful behaviour that I would rather live with a disability than with their consciences.

Dr. Kumar: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) said that he would not talk the Bill out. It has been said that some Opposition Members were not present for the whole debate. I have sat through the whole debate. I listened to the hon. Member for Kingswood and I sacrificed my speech so that the Bill could make progress. No one can deny that I sat through the whole debate. I am shocked. Six and half million people have watched the conduct of this Tory Government. The Government's days are numbered.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you consult the Procedure Committee because I and, I am sure, other hon. Members came to the House especially to vote for the Bill which I believe should go into Committee? There should be a 10-minute limit on speeches in private Member's time.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that you have been placed in an invidious position this afternoon. It is not just the past two hours which have been a problem. The fact is that the previous debate was timetabled by Tory Whips to finish precisely at 12.35 pm, leaving you with only one hour and 55 minutes for the next debate. Would you do what I have just done and look at the list of speakers for the two debates? You will find that in the first debate of four hours, there were 14 speakers. In the second debate on disabled people's civil rights, in one hour and 55 minutes there were 12 speakers.

Surely, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the traditions of debate mean that you have to decide whether to accept a closure motion if there has been sufficient debate. Traditionally, that has been a minimum of two hours. However, the second debate had almost the same number of speakers as the first debate. You would be well within your rights in the Chair to reconsider your decision, and, on the basis of the second debate having had an adequate number of speakers on both sides, now to accept the motion put by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and, on behalf of my constituents and 6 million disabled people at least allow this worthy Bill to be considered in Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have allowed a good run on points of order because I realise that there are strong feelings on this matter on both sides of the House. However, I can only repeat that it is the job of the Chair to carry out the Standing Orders and the procedures of the House as they are at present. That has been done. If hon. Members feel that the procedure should be changed, of course they are perfectly free to put their points to the Select Committee on Procedure, which would be prepared to consider them.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must make progress.

Private Members' Bills

SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Second Reading what day?

No day named.

SEA FISHERIES (WILDLIFE CONSERVATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 February.

PROTECTION OF PENSION FUNDS AND INVESTMENTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): With the permission of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 7 February.

CORPORATE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Mullin: With the permission of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 7 February.

EDUCATION (SCHOOL PREMISES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): With the permission of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday 7 February.

ARMED FORCES (LIABILITY FOR INJURY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

LICENSING (AMENDMENT) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered. Read the Third time, and passed.

TOURISM (OVERSEAS PROMOTION) (WALES) BILL

Not amended (in the Standing Committee) considered. Read the Third time, and passed.

SOCIAL SECURITY (MORTGAGE INTEREST PAYMENTS) BILL

Motion made,

That, in respect of the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SOCIAL SECURITY (MORTGAGE INTEREST PAYMENTS) BILL

Motion made,

That, if the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House, further proceedings on the Bill shall stand postponed and that as soon as any proceedings on any Resolution come to by the House on Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill *[Money]* have been concluded, this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 4th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Heseltine relating to Local Government Finance not later than Ten o'clock; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 4th February, the Motions in the name of Mr. Francis Maude relating to Supplementary Estimates 1991-92 and Estimates 1992-93 (Vote on Account) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or for one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, whichever is the later, at which time Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of them.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 5th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Hunt relating to Local Government Finance (Wales) may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock or the end of a period of one and a half hours after the first of them has been entered upon, whichever is the later, at which time Mr. Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of them; and those Questions may be decided after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

MOD Personnel (Injury Compensation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

2.43 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): May I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for selecting this debate?

Ours is a warrior nation and, because of that, the men and women of our armed forces hold a very special place in our hearts—at least in times of war. Sadly, however, in times of peace we are sometimes apt, as in Kipling's famous poem, "Tommy", to take them for granted. Because we truly are a warrior nation, right hon. and hon. Members—probably all of us—yearly on the vigil of Remembrance Sunday, echo those time-honoured words, "We will remember them." It is true that we will remember them. But what about those who are not killed—at least not quite? I refer to those who suffer horrific wounds, but who are saved from death by the miracle of modern science, good luck and their own outstanding mental fortitude. Many of them live on, but they are severely disabled. Do we truly remember them? I think that the honest answer is yes officially, but do we remember them well enough? I believe that we do not.

Regardless of political party, the people of our country feel that the Government should take more, much more, care of injured service personnel. In relation to the armed forces the Government should, above all, be seen as the very model of a good employer. I believe that the armed services are good employers. The Royal Navy, since the time of Nelson, has been ahead of most navies in the world, if not all. The same applies to the Army since the time of Wellington.

However, when an injured service man falls into political hands, I do not believe that we look so good. Too often, there are long and undue delays in receiving compensation and a woeful lack of information is given to the injured and their families. There is an apparent unwillingness to honour moral and financial obligations. On 8 December 1986, the Secretary of State for Defence said:

"members of the Armed Forces, by their very nature of their profession, undertake tasks which ordinary members of the public do not."—*[Official Report,* 8 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 85.]

I believe that that is a correct and telling statement which should be writ large on the walls of the offices of my right hon. Friends the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On 8 December 1986, the Secretary of State went on to invite the repeal of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. His lead was followed by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), who introduced the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987. It was an excellent Bill and I supported it. It allowed armed services personnel, for the first time, to be able to sue the Crown for negligence. However, with the passage of time, certain glaring loopholes have appeared in the Act. I mean no criticism, because the loopholes were not foreseen at the time. The Act was well intentioned and the loopholes have since appeared.

First, the Ministry of Defence was allowed to withhold documents on the ground of secrecy. I believe that that privilege has been abused on a number of occasions. Secondly, it abolished the flexibility previously given to the Secretary of State to make ex-gratia payments. I believe that that flexibility is a vital element of the humane treatment of those injured personnel of the armed forces, especially as, rightly, the Act could not be used retrospectively. I also believe that the Act has left the onus of proof to fall always on the injured service person. That is a heavy onus which could be lifted in some obvious severe cases. If one imagines having both legs blown off and one's body lacerated and, in order to obtain full compensation, being forced to take on the might of the Ministry of Defence in a law suit it soon becomes obvious that such loopholes should be plugged.

In Committee, the then Under-Secretary, for whom I have the highest personal respect, set out the three Government principles for settling cases. He stated that the Government wished to settle out of court in the interests of the plaintiff. He continued:

"we are not seeking to set up legal barriers by employing a raft of lawyers to deter genuine plaintiffs . . . we shall proceed diligently and quickly to reach settlements. We shall not seek to protract cases."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee C,* 18 March 1987; c. 22.]

He also mentioned the most interesting fact that the civil service estimate of the financial cost of the Act was £13 million a year after 10 years. It is now five years since the Act came into force and the total cost of claims is only £1 million a year. Yet the still deformed bodies of some of our injured service men are living examples of the injustice of under-compensation. The figures speak for themselves and confirm that there is under-compensation.

I come to the case of the three injured Grenadiers, Lance-Corporal John Ray and Guardsmen Adrian Hicks and Shaun Povey of the Grenadier Guards. I do so not to rehash the case—because I believe that there has been a just settlement—but because it is so well-known. Sadly, however, in its settlement, it is still a rare exception. It is also illustrative of the problems.

In the summer of 1989, those three Grenadiers were ordered to prepare a trench on the Batus firing range in Canada. While digging, one of them struck a buried unexploded anti-tank shell fired some years before but then concealed in the ground. The shell exploded, blowing both legs off each of the three Grenadiers. The explosion injured their bodies so badly that despite prompt and efficient casualty evacuation action, it took the best of medical science about two years to nurse them back to sufficient health even to be invalided out of the armed forces.

A board of inquiry was convened. While it concluded that none of the Grenadiers was to blame, it was not even required to investigate either why the blind shell was in an area used for trench digging or whether all safety precautions and briefings had been carried out effectively. Despite that, the House was assured, incredibly, that no blame was attributable. Perhaps that was legal advice, and I do not blame the Minister personally. That is illustrative of the problems that such injured people face—the need to get the facts through and have them heard openly, rather than everything happening behind closed doors.

About 18 months later, when the first Grenadier, Adrian Hicks, was invalided from the Army, the Government appeared to dig in their heels at the very thought of paying compensation, or at any rate compensation anything near the levels paid in civilian life. When Hicks was discharged on 30 December 1990, he was not paid anything other than his unemployment and sickness benefit from the DSS until 15 May 1991, and then

[Mr. John Browne]

only after a ballyhoo had been created by that fine gentleman who fights many such cases, Colonel Terence Otway.

Here were three men cut down in the prime of their youth by devastating injuries. They were mentally drained after a two-year ordeal in hospital and of course extremely depressed, at their immobility. They had no personal real wealth. Yet the mighty Ministry of Defence challenged those mutilated men to prove negligence. Worse still, the same Ministry withheld the full findings of the board of inquiry, even though those findings were vital to the proving of their case. It provided only an abridged version which left out the crucial and damning details.

Where was the spirit of the Government assurances that had been given to the Standing Committee on 18 March 1987? It was ignored and the Government fought those injured men to the very last trench. Fortunately, those Grenadiers were lucky. They were members of a strong and family-like regiment which not only gave them invalid motor cars but provided funds for their lawyers. As hon. Members are aware, pressure was brought in the House, by the media, and in the end the Prime Minister intervened and a just settlement was achieved.

Those Grenadiers were lucky, but a parliamentary answer given in another place on 14 October 1991, showed that many others had not been so lucky. Indeed, on that date there were still unsettled over 1,000 claims, 56 of them stretching back to 1987, five years previously.

I appreciate that there can be legitimate causes for delay. For example, there is need to prove negligence and there must be time for gravely injured men or women to have their physical conditions stabilised so that an assessment can be made of the degree of disability. But why are there so many, and such long, delays? Let us not overlook the trauma and anguish that is caused by such delay.

To help alleviate the situation and reduce the delays, I introduced the Armed Forces (Liability for Injury) Bill, which would have reversed the onus of proof for negligence for compensation for armed service personnel who received severe injuries in the course of their duties——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is not in order on the Adjournment to discuss legislation. I am sure that he can use his ingenuity to make his points without referring to legislation.

Mr. Browne: I respect that remark, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Minister knows the contents and purposes of the Bill. All I ask is, why does his Ministry continue to try to kill the Bill? Only five minutes ago, an effort was made to stop its progress through the House. It is iniquitous that this sort of Bill is not at least allowed to reach its Committee stage. Why is it not allowed a passage? Why is not the Ministry of Defence pushing the Bill forward to ensure fair treatment for the injured?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. He may refer to changes that he would like to see. So long as he avoids referring to a Bill he will remain in order.

Mr. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I respect your ruling on that.

I turn now to the provision of information by the Ministry of Defence. The first example is the case of the injured Grenadiers. Why was it not possible to produce the full board of inquiry report into an accident in Canada several years previously? The reason was because the report was restricted. Who made it restricted? The major in charge of the board of inquiry. It is easy for any Minister or senior officer to have that restricted qualification lifted. Why was it not lifted? Why was only a precis given to the guardsmen and their solicitors when the full inquiry showed—I have seen it illicitly—a story with interesting information that would have been important to them in proving their case, but was not given in the precis?

The second case relates to Mark Booth, a parachutist in the Fifth Airborne division. He was gravely injured in a mysterious convoy accident. There have been endless delays and the Ministry has provided the minimum of information. Why? How can it be seen as a good employer? I simply do not understand.

Then we have the case of Conrad Cole, Richard Gillespie and Lee Thompson of the Royal Fusiliers and others who were injured in friendly fire accidents in the Gulf. I fully understand that there are problems finding out exactly what happened. Other nations may be involved, there may be diplomatic problems and so on. But why do we refuse to give information and cause anguish and trauma to the injured men and their parents? Surely some of that information could be given up front rather than always having to be fought for, creating such a bad impression.

I have tabled many questions, particularly on the Grenadier case. Some answers came back. I do not know whether they can be called answers—perhaps I should say, replies. They were not only unhelpful, but almost downright rude. I asked for a list of the claims outstanding under the 1987 Act showing the names, the disability claimed and the date of accident. I did not think that that could be too hard for the Ministry. The answer was:

"No. To do so would be a breach of medical confidentiality."—[*Official Report*, 21 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. *190*.]

Could the Ministry not ask the men concerned whether they minded their names being put on such a list? I doctored the question and tabled a further request, this time just for the names and date of accident. I was told:

"To list the information requested would breach confidentiality and be in contravention of the Data Protection Act."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1992; Vol. 202, c. *453*.]

If that is true, the Data Protection Act 1988 needs amending urgently.

Other questions relate to the board of inquiry report. I asked whether in convening the board of inquiry report into the Grenadiers at Batus range any requirement was made for it to investigate why the blind round remained in an area used for digging outside the impact area of the live firing ranges. The answer was:

"The convening order directed the board of inquiry to consider all the circumstances that contributed to the accident.—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1991; Vol. 193, c. *465*.]

I have seen that board and my view is that it was not asked and certainly did not make any real investigation into why that round was there in the first place. That was bad.

In the interests of time, I shall skip other examples. Why is the Minister of Defence so intent on secrecy in this area? I do not blame my right hon. Friend personally for

that. I can understand that if there was an accident on board a nuclear submarine, there would be a real security risk—but not on a live firing range in Canada, an assault course in some Aldershot depot, or a convoy in Cyprus, or wherever. Why does such a great load of secrecy have to swamp every request for information by the injured men, their legal representatives and their families?

Why cannot the Ministry of Defence understand that by not being open, it increases the anguish for the injured men, their parents and their mates? Over time, that anguish turns into trauma. It also lessens the men's chances of bringing a successful suit against the MOD. That, by itself, must be grossly unfair. It makes the MOD appear so very callous and uncaring, and not at all the good employer that we want it to be. That is to the detriment of the Government in general and to morale in the armed forces in particular.

I have spoken about the flexibility that was eroded in the 1987 Act. It did away with the Secretary of State's ability to make ex-gratia payments to those deserving cases that occurred before the Act came into force. I agree that Acts should not be retrospective; I have always voted against retrospective legislation. However, I wish to cite two cases. Martin Ketterick, a Royal Marine, was on an exercise when a rope on which he was hanging while climbing a cliff face was cut by mistake. I accept that it was a genuine accident. The non-commissioned officer responsible was disciplined, so there must be some element of negligence by the MOD as the employer. Why has not that man been given compensation? He is almost a walking vegetable, yet he lies there without compensation simply because his accident occurred before the 1987 Act came into force. Why are not the Government generous enough to make an ex-gratia payment? Why could not such a system, by amending legislation, be built into the Act?

The second case is that of Andy Konalyk, a parachutist who was training on an assault course. It was pouring with rain and he had mud all over his boots. He was 30 ft in the air, he jumped across a 6 ft gap and one of his feet missed the girder on the other side. He slipped and smashed 30 ft to the ground. Six other people were injured on the very same day on the same assault course, so there must be an element of negligence. That man is severely disabled, so why is he not compensated as he would be in civilian life?

There is a clear, moral obligation to give compensation. Where is the heart in the Ministry of Defence—the same heart that it asks for and inspires in its employees, the members of the armed forces? Why are the Government so laggardly in calling for an urgent amendment to the 1987 Act to make good the gaps?

There is a need for the flexibility to award ex-gratia payments to be given back to the Secretary of State. There should be an obligation on the MOD to provide all relevant documents, especially the board of inquiry report, to the people bringing suit or their legal representatives.

If secrecy is involved, could not the MOD think of some way in which the information could be provided just to the lawyers under the Official Secrets Act? Why is no one pressing for that? While the provision of information is denied, there is an obvious and grotesque injustice.

I have highlighted delay, the lack of information and the lack of flexibility in the giving of ex-gratia payments. I want now to talk about resettlement—the vital transition of a badly injured member of the armed forces from their care.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but time is moving on. I am sure that he wishes to be fair to the Minister and give him an opportunity to reply.

Mr. Browne: I do, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

At this vital time of transition, the badly injured person moves from the care of the armed forces into local authority care. Such people are often severely injured and they should be prepared early for that transition, not in the last two weeks before they are finally invalided out of the armed forces. My right hon. Friend the Minister was an officer in the Coldstream Guards. He knows that officers in the Foot Guards must visit people in hospital every week. That is not universal practice, however. Surely it should be insisted on that men are visited in hospital, even if they are in a civilian hospital. Sometimes the Ministry does not know where a man is, because he is still in a civilian hospital.

Will the Minister also consider the possibility of ensuring that the Ministry liaises with the local authority concerned, the local office of the Department of Social Security, the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmens Families Association and the Royal British Legion, especially the latter. Peter Godley is outstanding when it comes to helping people with claims, but surely the MOD should be obliged to ensure that such liaison takes place.

The MOD suggested today that men take out insurance. The package is advantageous, although I do not think that it has many advantages over normal holiday packages.

On the whole, insurance is sold rather than bought. I am amazed that the MOD should imagine that 18-year-olds—physically fit and full of idealism—will start thinking at a depot, "I am going to insure myself against accidents." It is unreasonable to expect that.

I believe that it should be a condition of employment for every member of the armed forces to take out insurance. The payments should be deducted from their pay. If the MOD considers that too severe, it could—like an ordinary employer—subscribe to the cost. The insurance should be organised on a bulk basis; if it were arranged for the armed forces as a whole, the rate would probably be considerably reduced.

If the Government do not want that, why do they not insure themselves? They would then be more able to give generously in the event of accidents.

The United States has a veterans' department, which does an excellent job. I sometimes feel ashamed when I see how American veterans are treated—especially the injured—compared to the way in which ours are treated. Will the Minister consider introducing a similar organisation here?

I have left my right hon. Friend very little time, and I do not expect him to give detailed answers now, but I hope that he will be prepared to put his replies in the Library. Will he consider amending the 1987 Act to allow ex-gratia payments and to require the MOD to produce relevant documents?

Will he also agree to lay down enhanced regulations for resettlement on this vital matter of transition, requiring in particular liaison between the MOD and the organisations that I have mentioned? Will he require the MOD to publish status reports, on a three-monthly basis on cases that have not been settled?

[Mr. Browne]

Finally, will he examine in depth the whole question of compulsory insurance and the establishment of a veterans' department?

I thank my right hon. Friend for coming here today, and I apologise for leaving him so little time to answer.

3.3 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): My hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) has raised an important subject concerning the position of Ministry of Defence personnel—both service and civilian—who are killed or injured in the course of their duties. I am grateful for being given the opportunity to explain the position on some of the issues arising out of this matter. It is, however, a complex subject and, as it concerns the whole question of legal liability and the relationship between employers and employees as it is dealt with under the law, I am sure that the House will readily understand some of the background to the subject. However, it may be helpful if I give a short account of the way in which the present legal position on injured personnel has developed.

My hon. Friend mentioned the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, which enabled servants of the Crown to take proceedings against the Crown in the same way that any other employee could proceed against his employer. However, section 10 of the Act prevented the Crown or a member of the armed forces from being sued for damages for injury or death of an on-duty service man due to some negligent act or omission by the service. The House will recall that the law was changed in a Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and section 10 was repealed in 1987. While this removed the prohibition on members of the armed forces suing other members, or the Crown, it did not alter the law of evidence or the substantive law of tortious liability.

The Ministry therefore has a legal liability to pay compensation to service personnel where negligence can be established by the Ministry or someone acting on its behalf. The effect of the repeal of section 10 was to put service personnel in the same position as the Ministry's civilian employees—or, indeed, any other civilian worker—as regards the right to seek compensation for injuries received in the course of their work.

There has been much debate and a number of proposals have been made on proposals to change the basis of legal liability. They seek to remove some of the perceived disadvantages, particularly for service personnel, in claiming compensation from a Department of State such as the Ministry of Defence. One proposal was to extend the legal rights and remedies of service men to place them in a far more favourable position than Ministry of Defence civilians or any other group of civilian employees, by imposing an absolute liability on the Ministry in removing the requirement for service personnel to prove negligence when taking civil actions for damages against the Crown.

Although no one is more aware than I am of the worth and value to this country of our service personnel, and the risks to which they are exposed, the proposal to change the law in this way cannot be right. It is a fundamental principle of our system of civil law that for one person to seek compensation from another, that person must show that a wrong, causing him damage, has been done to him by the other party. In the sphere of employer's liability, it is not a principle of the law that an employee may claim compensation from his employer whenever he suffers an injury at work, regardless of whether the injury was attributable to an act of negligence and however much he has contributed to his own misfortune. That applies whether claims are settled in or out of court directly between the parties involved. The proposal would be contrary to current legal principles on personal injury and employer's liability under the law of tort and it would have ramifications far beyond the narrow scope of the proposal itself.

That does not mean that Ministry of Defence personnel, service or civilian, are left without any financial benefits if they are injured in the course of their duties. Indeed, the arrangements under service and civilian pension schemes compare very well with best employer practice. Any service man who is obliged to leave the service because of an attributable injury is eligible for pension and disability awards from the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Social Security, which administers the war pension scheme. Those awards are either lump-sum payments or pension payments with an additional lump sum. They are tax free, index linked to cover inflation, related to the degree of disability and reassessed if there is a deterioration in the individual's condition.

Those awards are made automatically, on a no-fault basis, if a service man is invalided as a result of his injuries. He is not required to prove negligence or make any legal claim for damages, with all the risks attendant on that process. Similarly, in the event that a married service man dies as a result of injuries attributable to service, enhanced benefits are paid under the Ministry's pension scheme to his widow and any eligible children. They are also able to benefit under the Department of Social Security war pension scheme. Civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence are eligible for benefits under the civil service pension scheme where injury or illness results in premature retirement, and may receive an enhanced pension for loss of earnings capacity where this is attributable to their employment.

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at thirteen minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 January 1992

PRIME MINISTER

European Union

Mr. Tebbit: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the commitments of the United Kingdom under the declaration of the conference within article C of the provisions of a common foreign and security policy of the draft treaty on European union.

The Prime Minister: The declaration has no legally binding effect. It does not alter the fact that unanimous decisions will still require the unanimous support of all member states. It is similar to the provision in the Single European Act calling upon partners to refrain from impeding the formation of a consensus.

Mr. Tebbit: To ask the Prime Minister if, in relation to article E of the provisions of a common foreign and security policy of the draft treaty on European union with regard to matters coming within the common foreign and security policy, he will state within which international organisations and international conferences the United Kingdom will retain its own representation rather than be represented by the presidency of the European union.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom will retain the membership and representation in all international organisations and international conferences it enjoys at present.

Sir Basil Feldman

Mr. Alton: To ask the Prime Minister (1) when he last met Sir Basil Feldman on official business; and what subjects were discussed;

(2) how many times he has met Sir Basil Feldman in the last 12 months; and whether Sunday trading has been discussed.

The Prime Minister: My normal practice is to neither confirm nor deny whether meetings with private individuals have taken place.

Office Costs

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Prime Minister if he will give the cost of running his office in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

The Prime Minister: The cost in 1990-91 was £8,225,816. The cost in 1989-90 was £7,669,276.

Note: Salaries and wages, notional pension liability, administration costs, the costs of office services and the grant-in-aid to the Chequers Trust are included in the costs. The Prime Minister's salary is excluded.

Businesses (Environmental Performance)

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has any proposals to recognise businesses who improve their environmental performance.

The Prime Minister: The Government's environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance", and last year's first anniversary report on it stressed that all parts of society have a role to play in securing environmental improvements. This applies not least to business.

The Government want to create the right conditions to encourage business to improve its environmental performance and to recognise and reward those businesses which rise successfully to the challenge. On my recommendation, Her Majesty the Queen has given her approval in principle to the introduction of a new Queen's award for environmental achievement.

The new award will recognise product and process development which has major benefits for the environment and which is commercially successful. It will form part of the established Queen's awards scheme alongside business awards for export and technology achievement. It is planned that applications will be sought in June and that the first environment awards will be made on the Queen's birthday on 21 April 1993.

The addition of environment achievement to the Queen's awards builds on the pioneering work of the Royal Society of Arts whose better environment awards for industry have led the way and generated invaluable experience in awards for business in the environmental field. The RSA plans to continue activity in this area in a way which will complement the new Queen's award.

Lord Lieutenants

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the lord lieutenants with the dates of their appointment and expected retirement.

The Prime Minister: A list of lord lieutenants, together with the dates of their appointment and expected retirement, is set out in the table.

County	*Lord-Lieutenant*	*Date of appointment*	*Date of retirement*
ENGLAND			
Avon	Sir John Wills, TD FRICS JP	April 1974	July 2003
Bedfordshire	Samuel Whitbread, Esq	January 1991	February 2012
Berkshire	John Henderson, Esq, CVO OBE	June 1989	May 1995
Buckinghamshire	Commander, The Hon. John Fremantle, RN (Retd.) JP	September 1984	January 2002
Cambridgeshire	Michael Bevan, Esq	August 1985	August 2001
Cheshire	William Bromley Davenport, Esq. JP	June 1990	March 2010
Cleveland	The Lord Gisborough, TD	March 1981	July 2002
Cornwall	The Viscount Falmouth	October 1977	October 1994
Cumbria	Sir Charles Graham, Bt	February 1983	July 1994
Derbyshire	Colonel Peter Hilton, MC JP	January 1978	June 1994
Devon	The Earl of Morley, JP	May 1982	May 1998

County	Lord-Lieutenant	Date of appointment	Date of retirement
Dorset	The Lord Digby, JP	September 1984	July 1999
Durham	David Grant, Esq, CBE	April 1988	January 1997
East Sussex	Admiral Sir Lindsay Bryson, KCB	November 1989	January 2000
Essex	Admiral Sir Andrew Lewis, KCB JP	August 1978	August 1992
Gloucestershire	Colonel Martin Gibbs, CB DSO TD JP	June 1978	February 1992
Greater London	Field Marshall, The Lord Bramall, GCB OBE MC JP	January 1986	December 1998
Greater Manchester	Colonel J B Timmins, OBE TD JP	December 1987	June 2007
Hampshire	Sir James Scott, JP	December 1982	October 1999
Hereford and Worcester	Captain Thomas Dunne, JP	July 1977	October 2008
Hertfordshire	Simon Bowes Lyon, Esq, FCA	January 1986	June 2007
Humberside	Richard Bethell, Esq	October 1983	March 1997
Isle of Wight	The Lord Mottistone, CBE	August 1985	December 1995
Kent	The Right Hon. Robin Leigh-Pemberton	August 1982	January 2002
Lancashire	Dr. Simon Towneley	March 1976	December 1996
Leicestershire	Timothy Brooks, Esq, JP	January 1989	March 2004
Lincolnshire	Henry Nevile, Esq	November 1975	March 1995
Merseyside	Henry Cotton, Esq	May 1989	July 2004
Norfolk	Timothy Colman, Esq	March 1978	September 2004
Northamptonshire	John Lowther, Esq, CBE JP	January 1984	November 1998
Northumberland	The Viscount Ridley, TD	January 1984	July 2000
North Yorkshire	Sir Marcus Worsley, JP	March 1987	April 2000
Nottinghamshire	Sir Andrew Buchanan, Bt.	February 1991	July 2012
Oxfordshire	Sir Ashley Ponsonby, MC	January 1980	February 1996
Shropshire	John Dugdale, Esq	February 1975	May 1998
Somerset	Lt. Col. Geoffrey Luttrell, MC JP	March 1978	October 1994
South Yorkshire	Hugh Neill, Esq, CBE TD JP	May 1985	March 1996
Staffordshire	Sir Arthur Bryan	July 1968	March 1998
Suffolk	Sir Joshua Rowley, JP	March 1978	December 1995
Surrey	Richard Thornton, Esq, OBE JP	May 1986	October 1997
Tyne and Wear	Sir Ralph Carr-Ellison	July 1984	December 2000
Warwickshire	The Viscount Daventry	February 1990	December 1996
West Midlands	The Earl of Aylesford, JP	April 1974	November 1993
West Sussex	The Duke of Richmond and Gordon	March 1990	September 2004
West Yorkshire	The Lord Ingrow, OBE TD JP	May 1985	August 1992
Wiltshire	Field Marshal, Sir Roland Gibbs, GCB CBE DSO MC	December 1989	June 1996
WALES			
Clwyd	Sir William Gladstone, Bt. JP	August 1985	October 2000
Dyfed	David Mansel Lewis, Esq, JP	February 1979	October 2002
Mid Glamorgan	Murray McLaggan, Esq, JP	January 1990	September 2004
South Glamorgan	Captain Norman Lloyd-Edwards	June 1990	June 2008
West Glamorgan	Lt. Col. Sir Michael Llewellyn, Bt.	December 1987	June 1996
Gwynedd	Meuric Rees, Esq	January 1990	March 1999
Gwent	Richard Hanbury-Tenison, Esq, JP	June 1979	January 2000
Powys	Mervyn Bourdillon, Esq, JP	July 1986	August 1999
SCOTLAND			
Highland region			
Caithness	The Viscount Thurso	April 1973	December 1997
Sutherland	Major General David Houston, CBE	November 1991	February 2004
Ross and Cromarty	Captain Roderick Stirling, TD	February 1988	June 2007
Inverness	Lt. Cdr. Lachlan Mackintosh of Mackintosh, OBE RN (Retd.)	September 1985	June 2003
Nairn	The Earl of Leven and Melville	July 1969	May 1999
Grampian region			
Moray	Captain Sir Iain Tennant	January 1964	March 1994
Banff	James McPherson, Esq, CBE	August 1987	November 2002
Aberdeen County	Captain Colin Farquharson, FRICS	March 1987	August 1998
Kincardine	The Viscount of Arbuthnott, CBE DSC	January 1977	October 1999
Tayside region			
Angus	The Right Hon. The Earl of Airlie, KT GCVO	June 1989	May 2001
Perth and Kinross	Major Sir David Butter, KCVO MC	November 1971	March 1995
Fife region			
Fife	The Earl of Elgin and Kincardine	October 1987	February 1999
Lothian region			
West Lothian	The Earl of Morton	August 1985	March 2002
Midlothian	Sir John Clerk of Penicuik, Bt CBE VRD FRSE JP	June 1972	January 1992
East Lothian	Sir Hew Hamilton Dalrymple, Bt KCVO	November 1986	April 2001
Central region			
Clackmannan	The Earl of Mar and Kellie	September 1966	February 1996
Stirling	Lt. Col. James Stirling, CBE TD FRICS	December 1983	September 2005

County	Lord-Lieutenant	Date of appointment	Date of retirement
Borders region			
Peebles	Lt. Col. Aidan Sprot, MC	October 1980	June 1994
Roxburgh	The Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry	January 1974	September 1998
Berwick	Major General Sir John Swinton, KCVO OBE JP	April 1989	April 2000
Strathclyde region			
Argyll	The Most Hon. The Marquess of Bute, JP	June 1990	February 2008
Dunbarton	Brigadier Donald Hardie, TD JP	June 1990	January 2011
Lanark	The Lord Clydesmuir, CB MBE TD	August 1963	May 1992
Renfrew	Major David Crichton Maitland	November 1980	September 2000
Ayrshire and Arran	Major Richard Henderson, TD	April 1991	July 2006
Dumfries and Galloway region			
Wigtown	Major Edward Orr Ewing	September 1989	September 2006
Stewartry	Sir Michael Herries, OBE MC	March 1989	February 1998
Dumfries	Captain Ronald Cunningham-Jardine	October 1991	September 2006
Island areas			
Orkney	Brigadier Malcolm Dennison	March 1990	March 1999
Shetland	Magnus Shearer, Esq, JP	October 1982	February 1999
Western Isles	The Earl of Granville, MC	March 1983	December 1993
NORTHERN IRELAND			
County			
Antrim	Captain Richard Dobbs	April 1975	April 1994
Armagh	The Earl of Caledon	March 1989	May 2030
County Borough of Belfast	Colonel J Elliott Wilson, OBE JP	March 1991	May 2000
Down	Colonel William Brownlow	January 1990	August 1996
Fermanagh	The Earl of Erne	May 1986	July 2012
Londonderry	Colonel Michael McCorkell, OBE TD	April 1975	February 2000
County Borough of Londonderry	James Eaton, Esq, TD	January 1986	August 2002
Tyrone	The Duke of Abercorn	December 1986	July 2019

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the confirmed cases of BSE in Northern Ireland *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* before 1991 on a county basis.

Mr. Hanley: Following is the information.

1991

County	Number of confirmed cases of BSE
Down	27
Fermanagh	19
Londonderry	26
Tyrone	32
Antrim	55
Armagh	11
Total	170
Prior to 1991	
Down	33
Fermanagh	12
Londonderry	12
Tyrone	25
Antrim	42
Armagh	9
Total	133

There are 1,533,226 cattle in Northern Ireland, and a total of 308 confirmed cases of BSE have been reported to date.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the location, including the county, of the incinerators which dispose of BSE-infected cattle that are currently operating in Northern Ireland and in each case give the potential capacity and actual capacity for through put each week of infected cattle; whether he has plans to introduce new incinerators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There are two incinerators currently operating in Northern Ireland, one at Dundonald, County Down, and one at Omagh, Co. Tyrone. These incinerators both of which are owned by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland are used for the disposal of a wide range of pathological material, for example, clinical material submitted for diagnostic investigations and post-mortem examination. The Department is currently installing a new incinerator in County Down. The potential capacity—based on 24 hours a day, five days a week operation—and actual throughputs are as follows:

	Bovines Per Week	
	Potential	*Actual Throughputs*[1]
County Tyrone	60	2·0
County Down	75	3·5

[1] Average weekly number of BSE infected cattle.

ENERGY

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list for the financial years *(a)* 1989-90, *(b)* 1990-91, *(c)* 1991-92, *(d)* 1992-93 and *(e)* 1993-94 actual or projected expenditure on (i) print and (ii) audio-visual

media advertising by (1) British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., (2) the Atomic Energy Authority, (3) Nuclear Electric and (4) Scottish Nuclear.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a commercial matter for the bodies in question.

Nuclear Materials (Protection)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the United Kingdom has submitted any amendments to the secretariat of the review conference for the convention on the physical protection of nuclear materials to be held in Vienna in July.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. The United Kingdom does not see any need to propose changes in the current international convention.

Euratom

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on 9 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *336*, he will set out the criteria used in choosing the appointees to the Euratom scientific and technical committee.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The scientific and technical committee must be consulted on any matters where the Euratom treaty so provides. The main areas in question are nuclear research, radiation protection and hazardous waste management. United Kingdom members are chosen for their expertise in these fields.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether, following the reply given by the EC Energy Commissioner to Mr. Llewelyn Smith MEP on 23 July 1991, European Parliament written question 958/91 EN, on United Kingdom plutonium stocks, he will now give the EC Commission permission to make public the amount of plutonium offered to Euratom on the United Kingdom's accession to the treaty of Rome on 1 January 1973.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has regarding the implications for future Japanese reprocessing contracts for Sellafield of the decision taken on 28 November 1991 by the Japanese Government's Science and Technology Agency to survey the safety and requirements to transport plutonium from the United Kingdom to Japan following reprocessing; and if Her Majesty's Government have been contacted by the Japan Atomic Industrial Forum Inc., which is conducting the survey.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am not aware of any such decision.

Coal Industry

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and Lloyds merchant bank about their proposals to apply for all or part of a privatised coal industry and to enable employees in the industry to become shareholders.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have met the Union of Democratic Mineworkers and Lloyds merchant bank to discuss their proposals concerning the coal industry. However, no decisions as to the form or timing of the sale will be made until after the next election.

HSE Offshore Division

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many inspector grade personnel who inspected offshore installations in the Department of Energy prior to 1 April 1991, have not taken up posts in the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division.

Mr. Moynihan: All such staff who were in post on 31 March transferred to the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division on 1 April 1991.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy that an amount equal to that spent on fusion research should be spent on research into non-nuclear renewable energies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: It is the Government's policy to allocate resources to research on energy sources in accordance with the needs of individual technologies and taking due account of their state of development. There is no merit in simply imposing arbitrary equality.

Linkohr Report

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the Linkohr report to the European Parliament regarding European Community expenditure on fusion research.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A copy of this report is in the Department's library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Djibouti-Eritrean Border

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place in the Western European Union concerning the deployment of French troops along the Djibouti-Eritrean border; and if he will make it his policy to request the removal of all foreign troops from the region.

Mrs. Chalker: There have been no discussions in the Western European Union on Djibouti. The deployment of French troops within that country is a bilateral matter for the Djibouti and French Governments.

South Korea

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he, Ministers or officials of his Department, held any consultations with his United States counterpart over the content of the recent intergovernmental agreement concluded with South Korea to sign contracts with British Nuclear Fuels plc on nuclear fuel services for South Korea's nuclear industry.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes, there was contact at official level, subsequent to the announcement of the agreement.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact which negotiations among members of the Commonwealth of Independent States on the deployment and control of their military forces is likely to have on international commitments previously entered into by the governments of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Russia, as the continuing state, takes on all rights and obligations of the former Soviet Union. We have, however, also urged the other former republics to take on those rights and obligations as far as they can apply to them.

The Minsk agreement on armed forces and border troops confirms the legal right of states to create their own armed forces. A high-level working group has been set up at NATO headquarters in Brussels to work with the new states to ensure that they uphold their responsibilities under the CFE treaty.

The Alma Ata agreement on nuclear weapons and the Minsk agreement on strategic forces will have implications for the strategic arms reduction talks agreement between the US and former Soviet Union and the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, NPT. We and our allies are actively pursuing with the former republics the means to ensure that these agreements are fully honoured and that all former republics other than Russia accede to the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states as soon as possible.

Iraq

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 9 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *321* on Iraqi nuclear scientists, if he will list the categories used by his Department for recording entry visas issued to people from Iraq from 1979 onwards.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Records are maintained according to the category of visa issued—that is, visit, settlement, and categories. In cases where visit or student visas are issued, application forms are retained for two years and then destroyed. No separate record is kept of an applicant's personal details or profession. In cases where visas are issued to settlement or other long-term applicants, application forms, and index cards recording the applicant's personal details—but not profession—are retained for 10 years.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on discussions with his United States counterpart on the terms of the possible accession of Byelorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We strongly support accession to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty of these republics as soon as they are in a position to observe the treaty obligations. We have been in close touch with the United States and with out European partners on these matters.

UN Secretary-General

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Secretary-General of the United Nations; what matters were discussed; and what agreements were reached.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I had valuable talks with the new United Nations Secretary-General, Dr. Boutros Ghali, during his visit to London on 13 January. We discussed a range of issues on the UN's current agenda including my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's proposal to convene a high-level meeting of the UN Security Council in New York on 31 January, which Dr. Boutros Ghali welcomed.

Pakistan

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column *321*, if he will state the name of the Norwegian company concerned; and if he will make a statement about United Kingdom assistance once the Norwegian authorities have completed their investigations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Treasury proposes to make a statement when investigations have been completed.

Indonesia

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings have occurred between Ministers of Her Majesty's Government and Indonesian Ministers during 1991; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Six Ministers met their Indonesian counterparts in 1991, either in London or in Jakarta. The Prime Minister also met the Indonesian Minister for Research. Discussions covered a wide range of issues.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the Government contracts between Indonesia and Britain since 1975.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: British companies have signed many contracts with Indonesia since 1975. Details are a matter for the companies involved. In terms of Governmental contracts, we sold obsolete tribal class frigates to Indonesia in the early 1980s.

East Timor

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the numbers of East Timorese *(a)* killed, *(b)* tortured, *(c)* missing feared killed or imprisoned and *(d)* arrested by the Indonesian security forces, since the occupation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Accurate figures are very difficult to obtain. We believe a figure of 100,000 killed or died of starvation is credible. We have no credible figures of the number tortured, missing or arrested.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government have taken following the Santa Cruz massacre in East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have made representations to the Indonesians on several occasions here in London and in Jakarta. Our position has also been clearly set out in EC and Council of Europe declarations and in the EC presidency statement to the third committee of the UN General Assembly.

We are also in close touch with our partners with the aim of supporting the efforts of the UN Secretary-General in this area.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Parliamentary Human Rights Group concerning the Santa Cruz massacre in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received the report of the Parliamentary Human Rights Group on the recent shooting incident in East Timor. Members of the group have also raised with us their concern about the events in Dili.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give the reasons for the United Kingdom's abstention on United Nations Security Council resolutions concerning the invasion of East Timor since 1975.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom, along with most other European Community partners, abstained on all resolutions passed in debate in the United Nations General Assembly between 1976 and 1982. We took the view that by so doing, in the company of other countries, we could help the process of reconciliation and the search for a diplomatic solution between Indonesia and Portugal. We continue to hold this view.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his *(a)* Portuguese and *(b)* Dutch counterparts concerning East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend has held several discussions with his EC counterparts on East Timor, before and after the events in Dili in November.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department has taken regarding those East Timorese missing after the Santa Cruz massacre.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indonesians are well aware of our concerns about those reported missing after shootings. We look to the Indonesian Government to investigate the fate of the missing fully and promptly, as they have promised to do. A further commission has been set up partly for this purpose.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost in 1992-93 of *(a)* cutting the basic rate of income tax by 1 per cent., *(b)* increasing the maximum for mortgage interest relief by £5,000, *(c)* increasing each personal and marriage allowance, including age-related allowance by £1,000 and *(d)* removing value added tax from granny flats.

Mr. Maude: The information is as follows:

(a) Reducing the basic rate of income tax to 24p would cost about £1·95 billion.

(b) Increasing the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief by £5,000 would cost about £300 million excluding the effect of behavioural changes following such an increase.

(c) Increasing all personal allowances by £1,000 would cost about £7 billion.

(d) Information on which to make an estimate is not available.

Bingham Inquiry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has given evidence to the Bingham inquiry.

Mr. Maples: Yes.

United States International Affairs Minister

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met Mr. David Mulford, the United States Treasury Under-Secretary for International Affairs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last met Mr. Mulford on 8 January 1992, when he briefed him on the Japan-United States joint communiqué on world economic growth issued by President Bush and Prime Minister Miyazawa. A copy of the communiqué is in the Library of the House.

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of requiring that all temporary service in the civil service count in full for pension, as recommended by the Priestley commission in 1956; how many persons would be affected; and at what ranks.

Mr. Maples: An estimate of the cost of allowing unestablished service rendered before 14 July 1949 to reckon in full for civil service pension purposes, including the cost of arrears of pension and increased lump sums, is not available. Information about the number of persons who would be affected and their ranks could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. If only those with such service who qualified for a pension are considered, and no arrears of pension were paid or change made in the basis of calculating lump sum retirement benefits, it was estimated in 1989 that some 100,000 pensioners would benefit at a cost over the next 25 years of the order of £400 million for the civil service alone.

Privatisation

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any further proposals to privatise more industries.

Mr. Maude: Work is in hand on the planned privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity, British Coal and British Rail. The Government continue to look for new opportunities for returning public sector industry and services to the private sector. Announcements of new candidates will be made in due course.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the levels of manufacturing output in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Mellor: Indices of United Kingdom manufacturing output can be found on the CSO databank which can be accessed by the House of Commons Library.

Pipe Tobacco

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been raised from the increase in duty on pipe tobacco announced in the 1991 Budget; and what proportion this increase represents to the total increased revenue from all tobacco products arising from the 1991 Budget.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The increase in duty on pipe tobacco announced in the 1991 Budget will raise an estimated £5 million in 1991-92. This represents about 1 per cent. of the estimated total increase in revenue from all tobacco products.

Derbyshire County Council

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of Derbyshire county council concerning the statements of the Financial Secretary 18 November, *Official Report*, column 32, concerning Derbyshire county council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I have received a letter.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the cost in a full year of increasing the ceiling for mortgage interest tax relief to £48,000;

(2) what would be the level today of mortgage interest tax relief if it had been indexed for inflation *(a)* since 1979 and *(b)* since an upper limit was first imposed on its value.

Mr. Maude: If the mortgage interest tax relief ceiling had been indexed in line with the retail prices index since 1979, it would be £63,000 in 1991-92. With indexation since its inception in 1974 the ceiling would be £131,000. The costs in 1991-92 of increasing the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief are shown in the table.

Ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief	*Cost of increasing the ceiling on mortgage interest tax relief in 1991-92*[1]	*Total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1991-92*
£	*£ billion*	*£ billion*
30,000	—	6·1
48,000	1·1	7·2
63,000	1·4	7·5
131,000	1·8	7·9

[1] The estimates are based on the distribution of existing outstanding mortgages and therefore exclude behavioural effects which could be substantial.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the liquidators of BCCI concerning the emergence of further evidence relevant to his answer of 16 October, *Official Report*, column *159*, concerning employees of BCCI; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: My right hon. Friend has received no representations from the liquidators of BCCI concerning the employees since my answer of 16 October 1991, at column *159*.

Deposit Protection Board

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many members there are on the Deposit Protection Board; if he will list the members of the Deposit Protection Board; and what is the budget of the Deposit Protection Board.

Mr. Maples: There are, at present, six members of the Deposit Protection Board. There are three ex-officio members—the Governor of the Bank of England, the deputy governor, and the chief cashier—plus three ordinary members appointed by the Governor. They are Mr. B. Quinn, Mr. R. T. Fox and Mr. T. P. Frost. The appointment of a fourth ordinary member is outstanding, following the resignation of Mr. A. S. Park.

In the year to 28 February 1991, the operating costs of the board were £314,000. For 1991-92, the original operating costs budget was £200,000, buf this will clearly be exceeded due to the extra resources required to deal with BCCI.

Bloodstock Industry

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet representatives of the bloodstock industry to discuss liability for VAT after 1993.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 15 January 1992]:* My right hon. Friend has no appointment to meet representatives of the bloodstock industry to discuss value added tax. However, I am always ready to meet representatives of the bloodstock industry to discuss these issues and expect to arrange a meeting shortly.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the aggregate balance of payments in the original six EC countries in each year since 1962, in the EC nine as a whole, after 1973, and in the EC 12 as a whole since 1986, both in value and as a percentage of their total gross national product.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 17 January 1992]:* Comprehensive data are not readily available. Details on the balance of payments current account of the European Community individual countries and in total from 1988 are given in the EUROSTAT publication "External Trade Monthly Statistics, Theme 6, Series B, December 1991" a copy of which is in the Library. Further details from the Community's statistical office will be forwarded to the hon. Member when available.

DEFENCE

Research and Development Funding

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the achievements since 1979 of the funding of research and development in universities and polytechnics by *(a)* the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, formerly the Chemical Defence

Establishment, and *(b)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment, formerly the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our policy to make available detailed information on the outcome of contracts and agreements between the Atomic Weapons Establishment and universities and polytechnics. The director general of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment will be writing to the hon. Member.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research and development contracts and agreements in universities and polytechnics are currently being funded by *(a)* the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment and *(b)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment; at how many universities and polytechnics; and what is the total value of these contracts and agreements.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The AWE currently has 24 research and development contracts or agreements with 15 universities or polytechnics, with a total value of £2·03 million. The director general of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment will be writing to the hon. Member.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many research and development contracts, agreements and projects his Department is currently funding in universities and other institutions of higher education in Britain; what is their total value; and how many of them are classified secret.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The MOD is currently funding in universities and other institutions of higher education in Britain 791 research contracts and agreements with a total value of £71·2 million. One is classified secret.

Semiconductor Materials

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department is giving to the Interdisciplinary Research Centre into semiconductor materials; and for how long this funding is due to last.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The MOD has committed £600,000 to the Interdisciplinary Research Centre on semiconductor materials through the joint grant scheme with the research councils. This is for the three years to March 1992.

Vacation Employment

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many undergraduates and postgraduates from universities and other institutions of higher education are employed during the summer vacation at *(a)* the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down and *(b)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston; and for what purposes.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: During the 1991 summer vacation there were 33 students employed at the Atomic Weapons Establishment. The director general of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment will be writing to the hon. Member.

Defence, Research Agency

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps are being taken by the Defence Research Agency to encourage universities and polytechnics to bid for his Department's research contracts.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have asked the chief executive of the Defence Research Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Chemical and Biological Warfare Agreements

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many agreements exist between Britain and the United States of America for the exchange of information about chemical and biological warfare; what are the titles of these agreements; how long each agreement has existed; what is the nature of each agreement; and which other countries are involved in each of these agreements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom abandoned all offensive chemical and biological weapons in the late 1950s. Since then the United Kingdom has been wholly concerned with chemical and biological defence, that is, the provision of effective protective measures for the United Kingdom armed forces.

Regular liaison and exchange of information takes place between the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as other allies, in the field of chemical and biological defence under a number of general defence agreements. A United Kingdom-United States of America-Canada memorandum of understanding on chemical and biological defence was signed in 1980, addressing exchange of information on chemical and biological defence research and development, and on production and procurement of chemical and biological defence equipment.

Research Links

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many formal links exist between his Department and universities and polytechnics to reflect commonality of particular research interests; what is the nature of these links; which universities and polytechnics are involved; and how long these links have existed.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The Ministry of Defence has links with a wide range of universities and polytechnics including contracts and agreements for technical and non-technical research, involvement in Link projects, and funding for joint grants made with the research councils. The Ministry also supports the Centre for Defence Studies at the university of London.

Research

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at how many *(a)* polytechnics and *(b)* universities his Department has funded research in the last three years.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Eleven polytechnics and 43 universities.

Education Links

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what formal links exist between universities and other institutions of higher education and *(a)* the Atomic Weapons Establishment and *(b)* the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, other than the awarding of research contracts and agreements.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Staff from the Atomic Weapons Establishment, as from other establishments, may be appointed as careers liaison officers to a university. When an undergraduate is taking advantage of MOD-funded bursary schemes, he or she may be allocated a tutor from an establishment, including AWE, with knowledge of the discipline being pursued.

The director general of the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment will be writing to the hon. Member about that establishment.

Collaborative Research

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department is contributing towards the Link collaborative research scheme; which programmes are being funded by his Department; and to what purpose.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: So far the MOD has committed £635,000 to Link projects. The programmes being funded are concerned with advanced semiconductor materials, nanotechnology and optoelectronic systems. The MOD participates in areas of work which are relevant to the defence research programme.

Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* service personnel, *(b)* service dependants and *(c)* national health service patients were treated as either (i) in-patients or (ii) out-patients at the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, during (1) 1990 and (2) 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The table shows the number of service personnel, dependants and other NHS patients who have been treated as in-patients and out-patients at the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in 1990. Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Queen Elizabeth military hospital Woolwich

	1990
In-patients	
Service Personnel	4,055
Service dependents	840
National Health Service	4,196
Others	189
Total number of In-patients	9,280
Out-patients	
Service personnel	10,596
Service dependents	1,849
Others	14,985
	273
Total number of out-patients	27,703

Facilities Charge

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide details of the facilities charge paid by United Kingdom forces stationed overseas; whether there are exceptions to the payment of this tax for troops stationed at NATO, the United Nations and other bases which are not run directly by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service accommodation charges worldwide formerly included elements for domestic rates, which were removed on the introduction of the community charge. Overseas, rates elements were superseded by the facilities charge, representing a contribution to the cost of facilities and amenities available to personnel and their families, from which they continue to derive the same benefit as before. The facilities charge currently ranges from £62 to £276 per annum, or double this in married quarters, depending on the type of accommodation occupied. The average payable is £208 per person per annum.

Personnel serving overseas with international organisations normally occupy rented accommodation, and receive allowances to cover the costs. Rates of these allowances are reduced to take account of the accommodation charge, including facilities charge, that would be payable in service accommodation. Personnel on loan service or exchange postings are subject to special arrangements reflecting local conditions.

Submarines (Fishing Vessel Avoidance)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the document issued to submarine commanding officers in respect of fishing vessel avoidance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Guidance on the avoidance of fishing vessels forms part of general submarine instructions which are classified.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a recommendation to submarine commanding officers that a record is taken of each breach of the suggested separation zone of 3,000 yd between submarines and fishing vessels; if he will place a record of these annually in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will examine this proposal as part of the wider consideration being given to the safety of fishing vessels and submarines.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to expand the notification scheme between fishermen and the Royal Navy to all United Kingdom waters; what progress has been made on discussions into this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 15 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *643*.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made regarding the recommendation of the fatal accident inquiry into the sinking of the Antares in respect of giving urgent consideration to a separation zone between submarines and fishing vessels of 4,000 yd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All the recommendations of the sheriff principal are being considered, including increasing the separation zone to 4,000 yd for dived submarines. I will make an announcement on this as soon as our consideration and consultation with fishing industry representatives have been completed.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to revise the document issued to submarine commanding officers in respect of fishing vessel avoidance; whether he will seek advice on the matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Advice issued to submarine commanders on this subject was reviewed and amended following the loss of the fishing vessel Antares. It is, in any case, kept under constant review and is revised as and when necessary, taking into account operating experience.

Nuclear Warheads

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has about the security and safety arrangements in place at the Arzamas-16 weapons research facility near Orenberg in Russia for tactical nuclear warheads withdrawn from deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Arzamas-16 is a former Soviet, now Russian, nuclear research and development facility. Appropriate physical and technical security and safety arrangements are believed to be in place.

Uranium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) of 12 December *Official Report*, column *543*, any unsafeguarded uranium used to fuel the BNFL reactors at Calder Hall and Chapelcross has ever subsequently been put under safeguards during or after reprocessing of the fuel.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There have been occasions when, for operational reasons, uranium used to fuel the Calder Hall and Chapelcross reactors has been brought into safeguards during and after reprocessing.

Fishing Industry

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning a meeting between representatives of the Ministry of Defence and representatives of the fishing industry held on 9 December 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This was the first meeting of a sub-group of the fishing industry safety group, set up to consider submarine operations and fishing vessel safety. The meeting was chaired by the Department of Transport and attended by representatives of the fishermen's organisations, of the Ministry of Defence and of the fisheries departments. There was a useful exchange of views and a further meeting is planned.

Submarines

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning plans to equip all Royal Navy submarines with devices to scan VHF channels.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: VHF scanning transceivers have now been fitted to all operational Royal Navy submarines.

Nuclear Weapons (Safety Review)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the nuclear weapons safety review being conducted by his Department has been completed; and what has been the cost to date to support the review.

Mr. Alan Clark: The review is almost complete, and a statement on its outcome will be made in due course. Costs for the conduct and support of the review have not been logged separately from other continuing work in the Department.

US Atomic Co-ordinating Office

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now make it his policy to publish the annual operating budget of the atomic co-ordinating office in Washington DC.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Nuclear Weapons (Information Exchanges)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to give the military commanders of each state in the Commonwealth of Independent States a full inventory of United Kingdom nuclear weapons by age, deployment status and location in exchange for comparable information from the CIS.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Successive Governments have taken the view that nuclear deterrence would not be served by divulging information of this kind.

Simon Brittain

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department expects to respond to the telephone messages left by the hon. Member for Nottingham, North at his Department's First Avenue House office regarding the case of Simon Brittain.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Attempts were made to respond to the message which the hon. Member left with the switchboard. I replied on 17 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *698* to the question the hon. Member tabled about Captain Simon Brittain.

Services Shops

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *514*, on President of the Service Institute or President of the Regiment Institute shops, what monitoring is made of decisions of commanding officers in relation to the PSI and PSR, being in competition with the NAAFI; and if he will outline the channels through which NAAFI managers may express their concern on the trading practices of these shops.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No specific machinery is considered necessary to monitor such decisions. NAAFI managers may express concerns either to the commanding officer or through the committees that exist for liaison purposes at local and other levels.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Wind Energy

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his written reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), *Official Report*, 9 December 1991, columns *281-82*, if he will set out the terms of the paper on wind energy presented by the Ministry's Agricultural Development and Advisory Service.

Mr. Curry: The paper covered the farm and conservation grant scheme available to farmers. Particular attention was paid to energy saving grants the aims of which are to encourage farmers to use renewable sources of energy, to help cut energy loss or to recover energy which would otherwise go to waste. They include, among others, the supply and installation of:

Wind or water powered generators in excess of 5 kW.
Wind powered pumps for field drainage.
Solar Heating panels.

Bovine Somatotropin

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animal test certificates for bovine somatotropin are currently in operation in the United Kingdom; how many sites and how many cows are affected; in which counties or regions they are operational; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Three companies have current animal test certificates authorising trials using bovine somatotropin products. Together, these permit companies to administer a BST product to a maximum of 1,287 cows on 23 sites, but no cows are currently being treated.

As the hon. Member is already aware, section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968 precludes me from disclosing further details.

Nuclear Waste (Disposal)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been Her Majesty's Government's contribution to date to the EC project Marina on the radiation effects of nuclear waste disposal in coastal waters, in each year since Marina was established; what have been the main findings of the project; and what are the comparative concentrations of radioactivity in waters surrounding the United Kingdom with the waters bordering the shores of each other EC country with a coastline.

Mr. Curry: Staff from this Department provided data, advice and written contributions to technical reports and scientific papers between the start of the project in 1985 and its completion in 1989.

The project, which studies sources of radioactivity in north European waters, concluded that environmental monitoring data in the EC from nuclear site operators, governments and other resources was entirely adequate for demonstrating compliance with dose limits, that maximum individual doses from controlled sources were all within the dose limits recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection, and that population exposure rates due to discharges from civil nuclear sites were a factor of 1,000 less than those due to natural radioactivity.

The range of concentration of caesium 137 activity in the Irish sea and the Baltic sea are similar, with concentrations off Scotland, in the North sea and in the English channel successively lower. Concentrations along the Atlantic coast and in the Mediterranean are at background levels.

Food Irradiation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list each EC country where food irradiation is permitted and the products which can be irradiated in each case; what information he has on irradiation of products from non-EC countries imported into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the following list of food irradiation approvals. The Food (Control of Irradiation) Regulations 1990 establish that irradiated foods may only be imported from countries outside the Community which have legislative controls and enforcement arrangements at least equivalent to those in Great Britain. No country has been approved to supply the Great Britain market with irradiated food.

Foodstuffs listed as approved for irradiation in the EC

Belgium
potatoes
strawberry
onions
garlic
shallots
black/white pepper
paprika powder
arabic gum
spices
(semi)-dried vegetables
shrimps
herbal tea

Denmark
spices and herbs

France
potatoes
onions
garlic
shallot
spices and aromatic substances
(inclusive powered onions and garlic)
gum arabic
cereal flakes and germs for milk products
dehydrated vegetables
mechanically deboned poultry meat
dry fruits
dry vegetables
strawberries
frog legs, frozen
egg white (liquid) dried or frozen
frozen or refrigerated peeled, deheaded shrimp
rice flour
aromatic herbs, (frozen)
poultry, ground chopped or cut
raisins, dried dates, figs and dry apricots

Italy
potatoes
onions
garlic

Netherlands
dried vegetables
frozen shrimps
fresh shrimps
spices and herbs
poultry
fish fillets
frozen meals for patients who need a special diet.

Spain
potatoes
onions

United Kingdom
any food for consumption by patients who require a sterile diet as essential factor of their treatment.
fruit
vegetables
cereals
bulbs and tubers
spices and condiments
fish and shellfish
poultry

Source: Published by the Joint FAO/IAEA Division of Nuclear Techniques in Food and Agriculture as a supplement to their Food Irradiation Newsletter of October 1991 (Volume 15, No. 2).

Agricultural Land (Planning Applications)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many planning applications affecting grade I agricultural land have been objected to by his Ministry since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The records currently show that a total of 1,993 individual planning applications were objected to in England and Wales during the period 1980 to 1990. However, the records do not show how many of these objections involved grade 1 land.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the confirmed cases of BSE in England *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* before 1991 on a county basis.

Mr. Gummer: The information is as follows:

County	Number of cases 1991 (Provisional)	Before 1991
Bedfordshire	54	69
Cambridge	49	93
Essex	70	112
Hertfordshire	46	110
Lincolnshire	119	218
Norfolk	443	384
Northamptonshire	181	208
Suffolk	204	308
Cheshire	777	678
Derbyshire	339	386
Hereford and Worcestershire	312	467
Lancashire	546	536
Leicestershire	412	597
Manchester	20	28
Merseyside	13	13
Nottinghamshire	84	16
Salop	386	610
Staffordshire	445	472
West Midlands	6	15
Warwickshire	191	248
Cleveland	22	32
Cumbria	536	463
Durham	60	96
Humberside	88	110
Northumberland	98	95
Tyne and Wear	5	3
Yorkshire North	721	939
Yorkshire South	55	82
Yorkshire West	106	109
Berkshire	91	162
Buckinghamshire	163	229
Hampshire	526	947
Isle of Wight	128	181
Kent	268	546
London	11	11
Oxfordshire	296	398
Surrey	140	243
Sussex East	228	351
Sussex West	387	636
Avon	404	533
Cornwall	1,464	1,915
Devon	1,965	2,738
Dorset	1,422	2,144
Gloucestershire	427	775
Somerset	1,876	2,184
Wiltshire	1,046	1,585

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the location, including the county, of the incinerators which dispose of BSE-infected cattle that are currently operating in England and in each case give the potential capacity and actual capacity for throughput each week of infected cattle; whether he has plans to introduce new incinerators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: At present there are five incinerator plants in England used for the disposal of carcases of suspect BSE cattle. These are located in Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Somerset, Nottinghamshire and Avon. Along with two other incinerator plants in Wales these currently provide enough capacity to incinerate all suspect BSE carcases.

We expect that these facilities, together with another which will become operational shortly, should continue to prove sufficient to incinerate all such carcases.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give a breakdown of the age at death of cattle diagnosed as having BSE during 1991.

Mr. Maclean: The number of confirmed cases of BSE in 1991 in Great Britain by age at onset of clinical signs is as follows:

Age at onset (years)	Number of cases Age known	Age estimated	Total
2	22	24	46
3	2,499	501	3,000
4	5,658	1,485	7,143
5	3,402	1,282	4,684
6	1,378	643	2,021
7	509	266	775
8	132	70	202
9	41	31	72
10	14	21	35
11	8	5	13

Age at onset (years)	Number of cases: Age known	Age estimated	Total
12	1	1	2
13	1	2	3
17	—	1	1
Age unknown	—	—	1,623

Sellafield

Mr. Shore: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has received any applications from British Nuclear Fuels for the release of krypton 85 gas from the Sellafield plant; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Routine discharges of krypton 85 from the Sellafield site are authorised under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. No further applications for the release of krypton 85 have been received.

Food Aid

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of each food commodity has been given by the United Kingdom to the former members of the USSR since the Maastricht summit; how many tonnes of each commodity donated by the United Kingdom came from intervention stores; and what the net cost has been to the United Kingdom to date.

Mr. Curry: A total of 120 tonnes of British beef has been delivered to the former Soviet Union so far under the EC's Maastricht emergency aid package of 200 million ecu. The remaining 2,080 tonnes of the amount that the United Kingdom agreed to deliver under the tranche of the package was due to leave the port of Hull by the end of last week for St. Petersburg and Moscow. All of this beef is from intervention stocks held in the United Kingdom.

Under the second tranche of the package, the United Kingdom is to supply a further 1,500 tonnes of beef from intervention.

The cost of the meat is covered by the EC. Arrangements to reclaim transport costs of the operation from the EC are also being discussed. The cost to the United Kingdom, other than staff time involved in organising deliveries, will come through our contribution to the EC aid budget of some 18 per cent.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teacher Training

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the present number of students in teacher training colleges; and what were the figures for each of the previous five years.

Mr. Fallon: The information is given in the table.

United Kingdom domiciled students undertaking courses of Initial Teacher Training in England

Academic year	Total number[3]
1985-86	31,554
1986-87	33,082
1987-88	35,173
1988-89	36,195
1989-90	38,167
[1,2]1990-91	42,996

[1] Latest year for which data exists: figures for 1991-92 not yet available.
[2] Provisional data.
[3] Covers students studying PGCE, BEd, Cert ED and other undergraduate ITT.

Sources:
University Statistical Record for University Departments of Education.
Further Education Statistical Record for Polytechnics and Colleges.

Research Councils

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was allocated to each polytechnic by research councils during 1990-91; and how much was allocated by the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The following allocations were made to polytechnics by each of the research councils in 1990-91:

AFRC Polytechnic	£000
Bristol	74
East London	26
Lancashire	80
Oxford	145
Total	325

ESRC Polytechnic	£000
Birmingham	25
Bournemouth	15
Bristol	432
Central London	161
Coventry	5
East London	65
Kingston	253
Leeds	35
Liverpool	51
Manchester	156
Middlesex	39
Napier	4
Newcastle	21
North London	55
North Staffs	35
Oxford	245
Portsmouth	40
Sheffield City	297
South Bank	22
South West	220
Sunderland	3
Teesside	220
Thames	4
Wales	37
Wolverhampton	52
Total	2,492

MRC Polytechnic	£000
Liverpool	12
London:	
City	23

MRC Polytechnic	£000
South Bank	114
East London	5
Nottingham	2
Portsmouth	22
Sheffield	27
Staffordshire	14
Polytechnics in Scotland	
Paisley College of Technology	17
Total	236

NERC Polytechnic	£000
City	2
Kingston	18
Liverpool	9
Napier	20
Oxford	55
Plymouth	238
Portsmouth	45
Sunderland	17
Thames	7
Total	411

SERC Polytechnic	£'000
Birmingham Polytechnic	310
Brighton Polytechnic	509
Bristol Polytechnic	201
Polytechnic of Central London	254
City of London Polytechnic	9
The Polytechnic of Wales	174
Hatfield Polytechnic	461
Huddersfield Polytechnic	318
Kingston Polytechnic	230
Coventry Polytechnic	778
Leeds Polytechnic	160
Leicester Polytechnic	753
Liverpool Polytechnic	352
Middlesex Polytechnic	158
Manchester Polytechnic	197
Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh	262
Newcastle Upon Tyne Polytechnic	420
The Polytechnic of North London	60
Polytechnic of East London	58
Staffordshire Polytechnic	523
Oxford Polytechnic	309
Polytechnic South West	671
Portsmouth Polytechnic	682
Sheffield City Polytechnic	576
Sunderland Polytechnic	330
Teesside Polytechnic	379
Thames Polytechnic	334
Nottingham Polytechnic	339
Wolverhampton Polytechnic	104
Lancashire Polytechnic	205
Glasgow Polytechnic	166
Total	10,282

Notes:

1. These figures include research studentships, industrial fellowships and postdoctoral fellowships as well as research grants.
2. The figures for SERC are for the academic year 15 September 1990 to 31 August 1991. The figures for the other research councils are for the financial year 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991.

The following allocations were made by the PCFC for research in 1990-91 as the final tranche of a National Advisory Board initiative launched in 1988-89.

Institution	PCFC Research Allocation 1990-91 £000's
Polytechnic of East London	180
Middlesex Polytechnic	300
Kingston Polytechnic	300
Birmingham Polytechnic	50
Coventry Polytechnic	250
Wolverhampton Polytechnic	180
Liverpool Polytechnic	300
Manchester Polytechnic	180
Sheffield City Polytechnic	250
Huddersfield Polytechnic	50
Leeds Polytechnic	180
Newcastle Polytechnic	180
Sunderland Polytechnic	300
Polytechnic of North London	50
South Bank Polytechnic	180
City of London Polytechnic	180
Polytechnic of Central London	180
Thames Polytechnic	180
Bristol Polytechnic	250
Teesside Polytechnic	50
Polytechnic South West	180
Bournemouth Polytechnic	50
Brighton Polytechnic	300
Portsmouth Polytechnic	250
Hatfield Polytechnic	300
Humberside Polytechnic	50
Lancashire Polytechnic	180
Leicester Polytechnic	300
Nottingham Polytechnic	300
Oxford Polytechnic	50
Staffordshire Polytechnic	180
Total	5,910

Note:

1. These figures are for the financial year 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991.

Student Loans

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list in respect of student loans schemes *(a)* the most recent figure for loan applications received, *(b)* the number of loans received, *(c)* the value of the loans and *(d)* the total costs incurred in administering the scheme in the Greater Manchester area.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As at 15 January 1992, the Student Loans Company Ltd. had received 7,474 applications for loans for the academic year 1991-92 from students attending institutions in the Greater Manchester area and had paid 7,269 loans worth £3·4 million. The company will very shortly pay fees totalling £30,308 in respect of correctly completed eligibility certificates received from those institutions up to 31 December 1991.

EC Research Contracts

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to establish a fund so that contributions can be granted towards the unfunded costs on EC research contracts received by United Kingdom higher education institutions.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Universities already receive substantial funding for research as part of their block grant from the Universities Funding Council. It is for

institutions to determine their use of block grant and other funding according to their own priorities. This includes support for European Community research projects. Improved cost recovery on commercial research projects by universities would free substantial resources for other purposes, including European Community research.

School Visits

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list the schools he has visited in the Greater Manchester area since his appointment as Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has not visited any schools in Greater Manchester since his appointment in November 1990.

Education Staff

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each local education authority the latest estimate available to him of the numbers of *(a)* qualified teachers employed in schools, *(b)* unqualified teachers employed in schools, *(c)* teachers employed as inspectors or advisers, or otherwise than directly in schools, *(d)* teachers and classroom assistants, playground and school meals staff working in schools, *(e)* administrative staff working in schools, *(f)* caretakers, cleaning and maintenance staff working in schools, *(g)* administrative staff working on education other than in schools and *(h)* any other employees of the education department, respectively.

Mr. Fallon: The following two tables show the numbers of qualified and unqualified teachers employed in nursery, primary and secondary schools in January 1991. Information on inspectors and advisers is not collected and it is not possible to separately identify teachers employed otherwise than in schools. Data on education support staff and administrative staff in schools are not yet available for publication. Information is not collected centrally on items *(f)* to *(h)*.

Full-time equivalent numbers of qualified and unqualified teachers in maintained nursery schools in England
January 1991

	Qualified teachers	*Unqualified teachers*[1]
201 City	—	—
202 Camden	8	1
203 Greenwich	28	—
204 Hackney	6	1
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	24	—
206 Islington	14	—
207 Kensington and Chelsea	15	—
208 Lambeth	19	—
209 Lewisham	10	—
210 Southwark	20	—
211 Tower Hamlets	35	—
212 Wandsworth	9	—
213 Westminster	10	—
301 Barking	—	—
302 Barnet	15	—
303 Bexley	5	—
304 Brent	16	—
305 Bromley	—	—
306 Croydon	12	—
307 Ealing	20	—
308 Enfield	—	—
309 Haringey	15	—
310 Harrow	—	—
311 Havering	—	—
312 Hillingdon	3	—
313 Hounslow	—	—
314 Kingston upon Thames	8	—
315 Merton	—	—
316 Newham	23	1
317 Redbridge	—	—
318 Richmond upon Thames	2	—
319 Sutton	6	—
320 Waltham Forest	10	—
330 Birmingham	71	1
331 Coventry	10	—
332 Dudley	5	—
333 Sandwell	10	—
334 Solihull	—	—
335 Walsall	15	—
336 Wolverhampton	20	—
340 Knowsley	—	—
341 Liverpool	21	—
342 St. Helens	2	—
343 Sefton	7	—
344 Wirral	11	—
350 Bolton	13	—
351 Bury	5	—
352 Manchester	34	—
353 Oldham	—	—
354 Rochdale	24	—
355 Salford	32	—
356 Stockport	21	—
357 Tameside	13	—
358 Trafford	—	—
359 Wigan	7	—
370 Barnsley	4	—
371 Doncaster	—	—
372 Rotherham	10	—
373 Sheffield	27	—
380 Bradford	22	—
381 Calderdale	—	—
382 Kirklees	20	—
383 Leeds	8	—
384 Wakefield	14	—
390 Gateshead	2	—
391 Newcastle upon Tyne	38	—
392 North Tyneside	8	—
393 South Tyneside	22	—
394 Sunderland	28	—
420 Isles of Scilly	—	—
901 Avon	68	—
902 Bedfordshire	46	2
903 Berkshire	66	—
904 Buckinghamshire	11	—
905 Cambridgeshire	20	—
906 Cheshire	20	—
907 Cleveland	4	—
908 Cornwall	3	—
909 Cumbria	20	—
910 Derbyshire	44	3
911 Devon	6	—
912 Dorset	—	—
913 Durham	66	—
914 East Sussex	8	—
915 Essex	7	—
916 Gloucestershire	—	—
917 Hampshire	13	—
918 Hereford and Worcester	—	—
919 Hertfordshire	44	3
920 Humberside	28	—
921 Isle of Wight	—	—

	Qualified teachers	Unqualified teachers[1]
922 Kent	3	—
923 Lancashire	94	—
924 Leicestershire	1	—
925 Lincolnshire	9	—
926 Norfolk	11	—
927 North Yorkshire	9	—
928 Northamptonshire	15	1
929 Northumberland	3	—
930 Nottinghamshire	17	1
931 Oxfordshire	27	1
932 Shropshire	6	—
933 Somerset	—	—
934 Staffordshire	51	—
935 Suffolk	2	—
936 Surrey	18	—
937 Warwickshire	18	—
938 West Sussex	12	—
939 Wiltshire	—	—
England	1,633	17

[1] Unqualified staff include licensed teachers.

Full-time equivalent numbers of qualified and unqualified teachers maintained (including grant-maintained) primary, middle and secondary schools in England January 1991

	Qualified teachers	Unqualified teachers[1]
201 City	11	2
202 Camden	1,155	58
203 Greenwich	1,835	56
204 Hackney	1,346	101
205 Hammersmith and Fulham	859	31
206 Islington	1,170	65
207 Kensington and Chelsea	619	16
208 Lambeth	1,350	37
209 Lewisham	1,674	44
210 Southwark	1,547	47
211 Tower Hamlets	1,827	104
212 Wandsworth	1,559	53
213 Westminster	1,003	58
301 Barking	1,185	29
302 Barnet	2,244	62
303 Bexley	1,618	34
304 Brent	1,752	40
305 Bromley	1,781	39
306 Croydon	2,136	63
307 Ealing	2,029	44
308 Enfield	2,065	29
309 Haringey	1,380	13
310 Harrow	1,353	15
311 Havering	1,836	38
312 Hillingdon	1,637	37
313 Hounslow	1,679	55
314 Kingston upon Thames	909	14
315 Merton	1,199	17
316 Newham	1,757	47
317 Redbridge	1,557	30
318 Richmond upon Thames	901	14
319 Sutton	1,192	18
320 Waltham Forest	1,633	58
330 Birmingham	8,317	63
331 Coventry	2,493	25
332 Dudley	2,442	19
333 Sandwell	2,559	21
334 Solihull	1,696	20
335 Walsall	2,492	42
336 Wolverhampton	2,220	24
340 Knowsley	1,363	5
341 Liverpool	4,026	48
342 St. Helens	1,564	3
343 Sefton	2,279	4
344 Wirral	2,844	17
350 Bolton	2,359	8
351 Bury	1,353	8
352 Manchester	3,710	45
353 Oldham	2,044	15
354 Rochdale	1,688	14
355 Salford	1,919	12
356 Stockport	2,184	17
357 Tameside	1,819	19
358 Trafford	1,481	4
359 Wigan	2,668	26
370 Barnsley	1,616	2
371 Doncaster	2,544	23
372 Rotherham	2,278	17
373 Sheffield	3,552	43
380 Bradford	4,569	38
381 Calderdale	1,621	14
382 Kirklees	3,318	25
383 Leeds	5,799	79
384 Wakefield	2,471	14
390 Gateshead	1,597	12
391 Newcastle upon Tyne	2,147	16
392 North Tyneside	1,673	11
393 South Tyneside	1,269	25
394 Sunderland	2,468	29
420 Isles of Scilly	26	—
901 Avon	6,640	93
902 Bedfordshire	4,346	79
903 Berkshire	5,317	65
904 Buckinghamshire	4,650	63
905 Cambridgeshire	4,947	57
906 Cheshire	7,396	117
907 Cleveland	5,155	43
908 Cornwall	3,368	35
909 Cumbria	3,878	14
910 Derbyshire	7,571	84
911 Devon	6,725	58
912 Dorset	4,139	36
913 Durham	4,648	25
914 East Sussex	4,223	37
915 Essex	10,996	198
916 Gloucestershire	3,970	39
917 Hampshire	10,699	103
918 Hereford and Worcester	4,928	15
919 Hertfordshire	7,704	151
920 Humberside	7,092	80
921 Isle of Wight	900	17
922 Kent	10,727	174
923 Lancashire	10,627	40
924 Leicestershire	7,267	86
925 Lincolnshire	4,185	44
926 Norfolk	5,292	55
927 North Yorkshire	5,235	89
928 Northamptonshire	4,792	58
929 Northumberland	2,514	27
930 Nottinghamshire	7,933	27
931 Oxfordshire	3,651	41
932 Shropshire	3,334	14
933 Somerset	3,275	11
934 Staffordshire	8,079	67
935 Suffolk	4,701	63
936 Surrey	6,230	77
937 Warwickshire	3,620	41
938 West Sussex	4,684	56
939 Wiltshire	4,096	34
ENGLAND	359,803	4,588

[1] Unqualified teachers include instructors, student teachers, licensed teachers, foreign language assistants and other unqualified teachers.

School Buildings

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current capital allocation to allow authorities to replace old and outdated school buildings which are unsuitable for operating the national curriculum in practical orientated subjects.

Mr. Fallon: Between 1986-1987 and 1989-1990, the last year for which we have final figures, total capital expenditure on maintained schools was over £2·25 billion. This is a substantial sum of money, which has enabled local education authorities and the governors of voluntary-aided schools to make significant improvements to the stock of inadequate school buildings, including facilities for operating the national curriculum in practical oriented subjects.

For its part, the Government have significantly increased the level of annual capital guidelines—ACGs—and capital allocations to voluntary-aided and grant-maintained schools over the last three years to over £700 million in 1992-93. ACGs have increased from £410 million in 1990-91 to £472 million in the current year and £524 million in 1992-93. Grants to voluntary-aided schools have risen from £109 million to £131 million to £150 million over the same period.

Specific further emphasis on improving facilities for teaching technology is the aim of the £25 million technology initiative for 1992-93.

Education Funding

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the funding of *(a)* city technology colleges and *(b)* schools run by local education authorities.

Mr. Eggar: City technology colleges receive Government grants for recurrent funding. Recurrent costs are calculated on the basis of pupil expenditure figures for LEAs which maintain schools in similar urban areas. This is paid to colleges as per capita grant on the basis of pupil numbers, along with earmarked grants for specific purposes. During the colleges' five-year build-up, per capita grant contains provision for extra administrative costs and to compensate for diseconomies of scale.

Schools maintained by local authorities are funded according to authorities' formula funding mechanisms as set down in statutory schemes of local management. National criteria for schemes require that at least 75 per cent. of school budgets should be distributed with reference to pupil numbers.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide figures of cost per pupil for each of the regions in England for primary and secondary schools for the last five years.

Mr. Fallon: In the last five years for which actual spending information is available, average school-based spending by region in nursery and primary schools and in secondary schools was as follows:

Table 1
Net institutional expenditure[1] per pupil, nursery and primary schools[2]

Region	1985-86 £	1986-87 £	1987-88 £	1988-89 £	1989-90 £
East Anglia	755	835	930	1,035	1,145
East Midlands	790	875	965	1,070	1,190
North West	780	855	970	1,035	1,140
Northern	825	925	1,040	1,115	1,210
South East	860	950	1,070	1,155	1,275
South West	745	830	935	1,020	1,135
West Midlands	795	875	980	1,065	1,165
Yorkshire and Humberside	845	930	1,010	1,135	1,230

Table 2
Net institutional expenditure[1] per pupil, secondary schools

Region	1985-86 £	1986-87 £	1987-88 £	1988-89 £	1989-90 £
East Anglia	1,055	1,120	1,335	1,515	1,775
East Midlands	1,150	1,315	1,480	1,685	1,865
North West	1,165	1,335	1,525	1,685	1,870
Northern	1,160	1,330	1,515	1,705	1,820
South East	1,265	1,425	1,620	1,765	1,925
South West	1,085	1,235	1,375	1,555	1,720
West Midlands	1,150	1,305	1,480	1,670	1,840
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,110	1,280	1,425	1,640	1,755

[1] Net institutional expenditure covers the direct costs in schools of salaries and wages, premises and certain supplies and services. It does not include the costs of school meals, home to school transport, LEA central administration, and financing costs of capital expenditure. The figures in the tables are derived from local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment and of their pupil numbers to the Department of Education and Science.

[2] Spending on nursery and primary schools is not collected separately.

Note:

The figures exclude those for the following authorities as their spending returns were not available: 1985-86, Merton, Newham; 1986-87, Haringey, Newham; 1987-88, Ealing, Haringey, Sheffield, Berkshire; 1988-89, Haringey, Manchester, Wakefield; 1989-90, Haringey, Hounslow, Manchester, Wakefield, North Tyneside.

City Technology Colleges

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the Government's programme for opening of new city technology colleges is on target.

Mr. Eggar: The CTC programme is making excellent progress. Thirteen colleges are already established and running, and two more will be open by autumn next year. In addition, the extension of CTC principles and practice into the rest of the maintained system is now under way. Indeed my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 15 January the establishment, with the joint support of British Aerospace, of Hutton grammar school in Lancashire as the first voluntary-aided technology school.

Primary Education

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list his Department's projection of primary school numbers for each school year until 1996-97.

Mr. Fallon: Projections to 1996-97 of pupils in maintained nursery, primary and middle deemed primary schools in England, together with the actual number in 1990-91, are as follows. Figures relate to full-time equivalent pupils expressed in thousands.

	Number
1990-91	3,946
1991-92	3,982
1992-93	4,033
1993-94	4,102
1994-95	4,160
1995-96	4,233
1996-97	4,285

Pupil Testing

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the pilot nature of the proposed key state 3 testing; and whether he intends to publish the results of this pilot testing.

Mr. Eggar: A national pilot of mathematics and science examinations will be held in June 1992. I strongly encourage all schools to take part in this as the best possible preparation for the first compulsory examinations in 1993. I intend to publish national analyses of the results, and I expect schools to report the results of individual pupils to their parents.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he envisages any role for local education authorities in key stage 3 testing.

Mr. Eggar: LEAs have a general duty to secure the successful implementation of the national curriculum and its testing arrangements in the schools they maintain. In particular, the Government are supporting £45 million worth of LEA expenditure on national curriculum testing for 1992-93 through grants for education support and training. LEAs are specifically encouraged to direct some of that funding towards preparing teachers for testing 14-year-olds.

Technology Schools Initiative

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the money available for the recently announced technology schools initiative is new grant allocation or if it will be included in an authority's capital allocation as supplementary credit approval.

Mr. Eggar: The technology schools initiative is being funded from part of the new money made available for education capital spending for 1992-93. Projects in grant-maintained and voluntary-aided schools will be supported through grant payments; those in county and controlled schools through supplementary credit approvals to the LEAs concerned. The revenue consequences of supplementary credit approvals will be fully reflected in an authority's standard spending assessment in future years.

School Transport Statistics

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the actual amount spent by each education authority on school transport for 1989-90; and if he will give for each authority the percentage of pupils entitled to free school transport and the number of pupil miles provided.

Mr. Fallon: Education authorities' expenditure on home to school transport in 1989-90 is shown in the table. Information on the number of pupils entitled to free transport and on the number of pupil miles provided is not collected centrally.

Net recurrent expenditure by LEAs on home to school transport, 1989-90

LEA	*(£000s)*
ILEA	5,546
Barking	275
Barnet	313
Bexley	484
Brent	752
Bromley	990
Croydon	925
Ealing	1,756
Enfield	N/A
Haringey	N/A
Harrow	860
Havering	808
Hilingdon	1,012
Hounslow	N/A
Kingston-upon-Thams	445
Merton	66
Newham	1,438
Redbridge	913
Richmond upon Thames	455
Sutton	672
Waltham Forest	935
Birmingham	2,916
Coventry	665
Dudley	666
Sandwell	835
Solihull	895
Walsall	537
Wolverhampton	474
Knowsley	379
Liverpool	1,866
St. Helens	614
Sefton	811
Wirral	1,588
Bolton	897
Bury	355
Manchester	N/A
Oldham	484

LEA	(£000s)
Rochdale	734
Salford	1,222
Stockport	N/A
Tameside	889
Trafford	683
Wigan	682
Barnsley	248
Doncaster	593
Rotherham	738
Sheffield	901
Bradford	1,721
Calderdale	724
Kirklees	1,224
Leeds	2,834
Wakefield	N/A
Gateshead	473
Newcastle Upon Tyne	762
North Tyneside	N/A
South Tyneside	186
Sunderland	448
Isles of Scilly	12
Avon	1,358
Bedfordshire	4,016
Berkshire	3,573
Buckinghamshire	5,694
Cambridgeshire	5,913
Cheshire	5,092
Cleveland	1,059
Cornwall	3,230
Cumbria	4,184
Derbyshire	4,873
Devon	8,401
Dorset	4,289
Durham	3,648
East Sussex	2,907
Essex	11,692
Gloucestershire	4,527
Hampshire	7,913
Hereford and Worcester	3,373
Hertfordshire	5,144
Humberside	4,580
Isle of Wight	848
Kent	12,035
Lancashire	7,034
Leicestershire	5,844
Lincolnshire	4,338
Norfolk	6,994
North Yorkshire	6,045
Northamptonshire	3,454
Northumberland	2,594
Nottinghamshire	3,666
Oxfordshire	4,402
Shropshire	3,401
Somerset	3,625
Staffordshire	4,750
Suffolk	422
Surrey	6,754
Warwickshire	3,424
West Sussex	3,497
Wiltshire	4,023

Notes:

1. Expenditure on home to school transport covers local education authorities' costs of their own drivers and vehicles, and their payments in respect of public transport and contract hire, used to transport pupils from home to nursery, primary and secondary schools and to special education schools or other establishments.

2. The figures are derived from authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment. N/A indicates that a return was not received.

Derbyshire College of Higher Education

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the application for polytechnic status by Derbyshire college of higher education since 16 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: We have received a number of representations, including from the mayor of Derby, the chairman of the education committee of Derbyshire county council and a number of hon. Members. Officials of the Department met the director of the college, together with the directors of some other colleges on 9 January, to discuss questions about institutional titles. Although my right hon. and learned Friend's announcement on 16 December made it clear that he does not expect to approve further applications for polytechnic designation, the route to a university title is not closed for institutions which are not polytechnics. Following consultations with the representative bodies of higher education, my right hon. and learned Friend announced on 15 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *582*, the criteria which must be met.

St. Faith's School, Winchester

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the status of St. Faith's school, Winchester, with regard to grant funding for expansion.

Mr. Fallon: I understand that the governors of St. Faith's currently plan to carry out improvements to the school in two phases, and that the costs are expected to be within the limit for minor works improvement projects at voluntary-aided and special agreement schools—£250,000. The Government have allocated £334,000 for such work in Hampshire in 1992-93. It is for Hampshire local education authority, in consultation with the governors and the diocesan authorities, to determine the allocation of these resources locally.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Procedure Committee Reports

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proposals, arising out of the outstanding reports and recommendations of the Procedure Committee, he intends to bring before the House.

Mr. MacGregor: The Select Committee on Sittings of the House will inevitably have implications for our procedures, including matters dealt with by the Procedure Committee such as length of speeches. Unless particular proposals for procedural change can be wholly divorced from the matters being considered by the Select Committee—and the recent review of the European Standing Committees which I am currently considering may come into this category—I do not think it would be sensible to deal with them in isolation, in advance of the Select Committee report, and I do not intend to do so.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Duchy Costs

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what costs to the Exchequer are involved in his duties, including transport; and in what circumstances a ministerial car is used by him.

Mr. Chris Patten: My office is expected to have costs of £89,862 in the current financial year. I use my ministerial car only when undertaking duties as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and in my capacity as a Government Minister.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Director of Public Prosecutions

28. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to review the role, position and powers of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The Attorney-General: I do discuss with the Director of Public Prosecutions, as part of the annual planning cycle, his role—and that of the Crown Prosecution Service—in the criminal justice system. There are no plans to change his statutory position or powers.

CPS (Disclosure Guidelines)

29. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to amend the guidelines issued in 1981 relating to disclosure by the Crown prosecution service; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No. The question of disclosure has ceased to be one of good practice—as under the guidelines issued by my predecessor in 1981—and is now a matter of rights and obligations. Further guidelines would not be a suitable means of effecting any modification deemed necessary.

Serious Fraud Office

31. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Attorney-General how many overseas visits have been made by Serious Fraud Office staff since 5 December.

The Attorney-General: Five overseas visits have been made by Serious Fraud Office staff since 5 December 1991 in the course of current inquiries.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions of City institutions for fraud were brought by the Serious Fraud Office in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: In 1991 the Serious Fraud Office commenced prosecutions in 14 different cases against 45 individual defendants. Proceedings were concluded during 1991 in 25 cases and trials were commenced but not concluded in three others. In the same period 45 defendants were convicted of or pleaded guilty to one or more criminal offence and eight defendants were acquitted at court of trial. The conviction rate of 85 per cent. which indicates the effectiveness of the Serious Fraud Office in investigating and prosecuting serious or complex fraud. The figures are not susceptible to classification in the manner suggested by the hon. Member's questions.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Attorney-General if he will call for a report from the Director of the Serious Fraud Office on property stolen from the National Union of Mineworkers discovered in the course of the Serious Fraud Office investigation of Mirror Group Newspapers.

The Attorney-General: No. No allegations of this nature have been brought to the attention of the director of the Serious Fraud Office in the course of the investigations of Mirror Group Newspapers or at all.

Covenants

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Attorney-General what discussions he has had with the Law Reform Committee about the enforcement of covenants.

The Attorney-General: There have been no discussions with the Law Reform Committee about the enforcement of covenants. The Law Commission issued a report on "Transfer of Land: Obsolete Restrictive Covenants" (Law Com. No. 201, HC 546) in July 1991. The Lord Chancellor is considering the commission's recommendations.

Northern Ireland Court of Appeal

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Attorney-General how many cases he referred to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland in 1991; and what were the grounds in each case.

The Attorney-General: In 1991 I referred two cases to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland. One case was referred under section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 on the ground that the sentences were unduly lenient. The other case was referred under section 15 of the Criminal Appeal (Northern Ireland) Act 1980 on a point of law arising under section 18(1)*(b)* of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Attorney-General how many court actions relating to mortgage repossessions there were in the Heywood and Middleton constituency since 1979.

The Attorney-General: The number of mortgage possession actions entered and orders made in the county courts of Bury and Oldham, which cover the Heywood and Middleton area respectively, is given below. This information is only available from 1987. Not all the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession.

Mortgage Possession—Actions Entered and Orders Made

	Bury County Court		*Oldham County Court*	
	Actions entered	*Orders made*	*Actions entered*	*Orders made*
1987	552	390	619	435
1988	485	269	576	376
1989	448	357	506	386
1990	423	367	595	328
1991[1]	764	649	833	517

[1] January to November.

Union Flag

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General why the Union flag was not flown on the flag poles at the courthouse in Armagh city on Christmas day 1991; what

new arrangements will be made to fly the Union flag on appropriate dates at this location; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Union flag was not flown at the courthouse in Armagh city on Christmas day through oversight.

Cases (Government Representation)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Attorney-General in how many cases Her Majesty's Government have been represented by *(a)* the Attorney-General and *(b)* other barristers in each year since 1979.

The Attorney-General: My predecessor represented the Government twice in 1979, and I represented the Government as Attorney-General twice in 1989. Those figures do not include cases in which I represented the Government as Solicitor-General or cases in which the Attorney-General does not represent the Government but acts for the crown as guardian of the public interest. The other information sought by the hon. Member could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Alun Michael: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list all items of United Kingdom legislation which have been or are being subjected to legal challenge in the European Court *(a)* on the grounds of an alleged conflict with article 30 of the treaty of Rome, *(b)* on the grounds of an alleged conflict with another article of the treaty or *(c)* on some other grounds, together with the date on which each challenge was instituted and the date of the court decision.

The Attorney-General: The following cases in which items of United Kingdom legislation are in issue are currently before the European Court of Justice, having been referred pursuant to article 169, 178, 215 or 177 of the treaty:

Cases C279/89, C30/90 (Article 169).
Case C55/90 (Article 178 and 215).
Cases C169/91, C304/90, C191/90, C306/88, C232/88, C370/90, C251/90, C271/91, C64/91, C63/91, C9/91, C243/90.

Details of these cases are set out in the annex.

Summaries of cases concerning the United Kingdom in which the court has already delivered judgment are contained in the six monthly White Paper on Developments in the European Community, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

ANNEX

Name of case	*ECJ number of case*	*Item of United Kingdom legislation*	*Item of Community legislation*	*Date referred to ECJ*
Article 169 cases				
[1] Commission *v.* United Kingdom	C30/90	Section 48 of Patents Act 1977	Article 30 of Treaty	30 January 1990
[2] and [3] Commission *v.* United Kingdom	C279/89	Fishing licence conditions under Seafish (Conservation) Act 1967	Articles 34, 48, 52 and 59 of Treaty and Regulation 1408/71 and 1251/70	12 August 1989
Article 178 and 215 case				
[3] Cato *v.* Commission	C55/90	Fishing Vessels (Financial Assistance) Scheme 1983 SI 1983/1883	Directive 83/515	7 March 1990
Article 177 cases				
[1] Stoke and Norwich *v.* B & Q	C169/91	Shops Acts 1950	Article 30 of Treaty	20 May 1991
[1] Reading Borough Council *v.* Payless	C304/90	Shops Act 1950	Article 30 of Treaty	9 August 1990
[1] Generics (UK) *v.* Smith Kline French	C191/90	Patents Act 1977	Article 30 of Treaty	13 February 1990
[1] Rochdale Borough Council *v.* Anders	C306/88	Shops Act 1950	Article 30 of Treaty	21 November 1988
[1] Derry City Council *v.* Hampden Homecare	C232/88	Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946	Article 30 of Treaty	6 July 1988
[2] and [3] R *v.* Immigration Appeal Tribunal ex parte Surinder Singh	C370/90	Immigration Act 1971 (deportation)	Article 52 of Treaty and Directive 73/148	19 October 1990
[2] and [3] Procurater Fiscal *v.* Wood & Cowie	C251/90 C252/90	Conditions in licences issued under Seafish (Conservattion) Act 1967	Article 7 of Treaty and Regulation 101/76	26 January 1990
[3] Marshall *v.* South west Hants AHA	C271/91	S.65 Sex Discrimination Act 1975	Directive 76/207	14 October 1991
[3] Cresswell *v.* Chief Adjudication Officer	C64/91	Social Security Act 1986 (income support)	Directive 79/7 Directive 76/207	21 December 1990
[3] Jackson *v.* Chief Adjudication Officer	C63/91	Supplementary Benefit Act 1986 (now repealed)	Directive 79/7 Directive 76/207	21 December 1990
[3] R *v.* Secretary of State for Social Security ex parte EOC	C9/91	Social Security Act 1975 (National Insurance Contributions)	Directive 79/7	3 December 1990

Name of case	ECJ number of case	Item of United Kingdom legislation	Item of Community legislation	Date referred to ECJ
[3] R v. Secretary of State for Social Security ex parte Smithson	C243/90	Housing Benefit (General) Regulations 1987	Directive 79/7	26 June 1990

[1] alleged conflict with article 30.
[2] alleged conflict with another article of the treaty
[3] some other grounds

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Caribbean Basin

35. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom aid to the Caribbean basin.

Mrs. Chalker: I attach considerable importance to our aid programmes for the Commonwealth countries and the British dependent territories in the Caribbean. Expenditure is around £40 million a year.

Rain Forests

36. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent applications for development assistance are vetted beside the need to conserve untouched virgin tracts of rain forest jungle.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government's policy is to encourage sustainable management of all tropical forests. All ODA projects are vetted for their environmental and social impact. Where our assessment is that damage could result, we insist on designs being changed or the project not proceeding.

EC Overseas Development

37. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place with Britain's EC partners on EC overseas development matters in the last month.

Mrs. Chalker: I last discussed development issues with my EC colleagues at the Development Council in Brussels on 28 November 1991. My officials are in frequent contact with their opposite numbers in the Commission and other member states.

Liberia

38. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what overseas aid is at present being given to Liberia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In the current financial year we expect to spend around £547,000 on humanitarian aid in response to the Liberian emergency, some £90,000 on the training of Liberians in the United Kingdom, £15,000 on other technical co-operation costs, and £159,000 to cover our share of guarantee payments due on Liberian loan defaults to the European investment bank.

World Population Conference

39. **Sir Charles Morrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Minister for Overseas Development will address the British parliamentary group's population and development conference for European parliamentarians on the subject of the European agenda for action on world population; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I much regret that I will be unable to attend this conference, because of my forthcoming visit to southern Africa. My noble Friend the Earl of Caithness has agreed to attend in my place. My officials will play a major role in support to European Action on World Population. I look forward to the conclusions of the conference with considerable interest.

Eastern and Central Europe

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions the Minister for Overseas Development has had with her ministerial colleagues representing the other member states of the European Community on the question of aid to eastern and central European countries.

Mrs. Chalker: There have been frequent discussions with other EC members at both ministerial and official level on this subject.

Baltic States

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much overseas aid has been granted to date by the United Kingdom to each of the three Baltic states; and what are the estimated totals for the current year.

Mrs. Chalker: The know-how fund has committed £468,920 to date on technical assistance projects for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Many of the projects cover all three countries. A list is given in the table. A further £452,500 has been allocated to projects which are scheduled to begin before the end of the current financial year.

KNOW-HOW FUND
ESTONIA, LATVIA, LITHUANIA

List of approved projects

1. Title
2. Description
3. Counterpart
4. Status
5. Total cost of KHF contribution

Small business creation

1. Mitaline Technology
2. Preparation of a training programme for use by Estonian Small Business Association
3. Estonian Small Business Association
4. Approved
5. £4,820

Financial services

1. Ports privatisation conference
2. Director of Estonian Maritime Board to attend the conference
3. Estonian Maritime Board

4. Approved
5. £900

1. Transcend technology (Lithuania)
2. To provide assistance to the Association of Light Industry Enterprises of Lithuania to prepare individual state enterprises for privatisation
3. Association of Light Industries
4. Approved
5. £9,800

Political and cultural

1. Restructuring MFAs
2. Senior retired UK diplomats on short attachments to Ministries of Foreign Affairs in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. To advise on restructuring in a democratic society
3. Ministries of Foreign Affairs
4. Approved
5. £15,000

1. Police training missions
2. Senior officers from Strathclyde police on short missions to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to advise on police training needs, restructuring etc.
3. Police authorities
4. Approved
5. £20,000

1. Low-cost book scheme
2. Subsidies for text books for retailers and individuals in three Baltic states
3. International Book Development
4. Approved
5. £66,000

1. Short-term scholarships
2. One year scholarships for postgraduates and young professionals in the three Baltics. Target areas economics, finance and management
3. —
4. Approved
5. £120,000

1. Bradford Baltic unit
2. Attachment of students from the three Baltic states to the Baltic unit of Bradford university
3. Bradford university
4. Approved
5. £70,900

1. Books for Parliaments
2. Provision of text books in key areas to libraries of Baltic Parliaments
3. Parliamentary libraries
4. Approved
5. £15,000

1. Seminar for parliamentary librarians
2. Training seminar for parliamentary librarians from the three Baltic libraries
3. Parliamentary libraries
4. Approved
5. £8,000

1. Legal attachments
2. Attachments of young lawyers from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the Law Society of Scotland and Scottish legal practices
3. Law Societies
4. Approved
5. £40,000

1. Legal Concepts for Translators
2. Training in legal concepts in English for translators attached to the Office of the Lithuanian Supreme Council
3. University of Edinburgh
4. Approved
5. £10,000

1. TV training project
2. Assisting trainees from the three Baltic states in British TV production procedures
3. Soros Foundation
4. Approved
5. £26,000

1. Visit of Lithuanian MFA Deputy Chief of Protocol
2. Familiarisation Visit
3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania
4. Approved
5. £2,000

1. Publisher training
2. Seminar on publishing and book trade in Lithuania
3. Open Society Foundation of Lithuania
4. Approved
5. £30,000

1. Baltics Conference
2. Royal Institute of International Affairs conference on the re-integration of the Baltics into the world community
3. Governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia
4. Approved
5. £6,000

Missions

1. Banking, finance and privatisation mission
2. Short mission to Baltic republics to identify potential projects and terms of reference
3. Know-how fund adviser
4. Approved—December 1991
5. £11,000

1. Insurance mission
2. Short mission to the Baltics to identify potential projects and terms of reference
3. Know-how fund consultant
4. Approved—December 1991
5. £6,000

1. Energy audit mission
2. Assessment mission to Lithuania to prepare in cooperation with Lithuanian Ministry of Energy for national energy audit
3. Know-how fund consultant
4. Approved—October 1991
5. £3,500

1. Joint exchanges committee mission
2. To advise on setting up physical commodity exchange
3. Lithuanian authorities
4. Approved—October 1991
5. £4,000

Debtor Countries

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries whose debts have been written off by Her Majesty's Government, and those countries whose debts have been reduced by two thirds, in the last six months.

Mrs. Chalker: Debt cancellation of up to two thirds is a feature of the proposals for enhanced debt relief made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in Trinidad in 1990. We are delighted that in mid-December, as a direct result of these proposals, the Paris Club began implementing enhanced debt relief on Trinidad terms. Nicaragua and Benin were the first countries to benefit and I hope, and expect, that they will shortly be followed by other poor and indebted countries which are undertaking economic reform. The United Kingdom will continue to push for improvements in the terms offered, along the lines of the Prime Minister's original Trinidad terms proposals.

Third World Debt

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is proposing over the cancellation of third world debt; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government believe that, for those poorest countries whose efforts to achieve economic growth have been hampered by the heaviest debt burdens, debt relief has an important role to play. We were delighted to achieve Paris Club consensus in mid-December, when government creditors began to implement enhanced debt relief on Trinidad terms for the first time. This advance was a direct result of the proposals made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as Chancellor, in 1990. The United Kingdom will continue to push for full implementation, by all creditors, of the original Trinidad terms proposals which addressed the entire stock of a country's official debt and allowed for increased concessionality.

Southern Africa

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of aid in 1991 in southern Africa was for educational purposes.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1990 (the latest calendar year for which figures are available), British bilateral aid in total and for the education sector for the countries of southern Africa was as follows:

Recipient[1]	*Aid*[2] *£ million*	*Education sector*[3] *£ million*	*Per cent*
Angola	1·2	0·2	17·0
Botswana	6·6	1·7	26·0
Lesotho	5·8	0·9	15·0
Malawi	30·1	2·1	7·0
Mozambique	25·4	0·2	1·0
Namibia	1·5	0·4	28·0
South Africa	6·3	4·2	66·0
Swaziland	2·1	0·4	19·0
Tanzania	22·3	1·7	8·0
Zambia	24·0	3·0	12·0
Zimbabwe	14·6	1·3	9·0
SADCC	6·3	0·1	2·0
Total	146·2	16·2	11·0

[1] Member states of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference plus South Africa (programme of assistance for black South Africans).

[2] Gross bilateral aid, excluding investments by the Commonwealth Development Corporation and narcotics-related assistance funded by the Home Office and diplomatic wing of the Foreign and Commonwealth office.

[3] Assistance provided mainly in the form of technical co-operation, including teacher and other related training, provision of experts and consultants, funding of volunteers and the supply of books and other materials. Figures exclude training in non-education-related subjects.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dr. Malde Modwadia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will pay compensation to Dr. Malde Modwadia of 245 Goodwood road, Leicester, following his acquittal at Northampton crown court on 8 January 1992.

Mr. John Patten: If Dr. Malde Modwadia applies to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for compensation his application will be carefully considered in accordance with the current relevant arrangements for the payment of compensation.

Prisons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by year on 1 December for the 10 years to 1991, and for each of Her Majesty's prison establishments in the United Kingdom, the number of prisoners held at each establishment, by category.

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates have been displaced in the last two years as a result of the discovery of design faults in new prisons in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am sorry that the information requested is not available, but very few prisoners would have been transferred for these reasons.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of rectifying each design fault which has been found since 1982, in new prisons in England and Wales; and if he will specify the prisons concerned.

Mrs. Rumbold: The available information on expenditure incurred in rectifying design faults found since 1982 in new prisons in England and Wales is as follows:

	£
HM prison, Frankland (opened 1982)	
Modification to workshops	300,000
Improvements to windows	180,000
Upgrading of utilities	133,000
Enhancement of fire precautions	114,000
	727,000
HM prison, Stocken (opened 1985)	
Flooring	30,000
Repairs to heating system	235,000
Repairs to staff quarters	250,000
	515,000
HM young offenders institution, Thorn Cross (opened 1985)	
Sports hall roof	100,000
Modifications to boiler house and heating system	181,000
	281,000
HM prison, Garth (opened 1988)	
Modifications to kitchen	250,000
Other work	15,000
	265,000
HM young offenders institution, The Mount (opened 1988)	
Improvements in security	280,000

Comparable figures are not readily available for other new establishments, where in a number of cases negotiations on liabilities for defects are in progress.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison staff have been transferred on a temporary or permanent basis in the last two years as a result of additional prison building work necessitated by the discovery of design faults in prisons in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: No staff have been permanently or temporarily transferred from new prisons as a result of design faults in the last two years.

From time to time it may be necessary to transfer staff when refurbishment work is undertaken to bring older prisons up to modern standards, but no statistical information is recorded about the number of officers transferred for this purpose.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by year on 1 December for the 10 years to 1991, and for each of Her Majesty's prison establishments in the United Kingdom, the number of prison officers in post, and by sex.

Mrs. Rumbold: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Police Interrogation

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to install video recording equipment at all police stations to be used during the interrogation of suspects;

(2) if he will list the police stations that currently use video recordings of interrogation of suspects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There are no current plans to introduce video-recording of interviews of suspects in all police stations. Interviews with suspects are being video-recorded in stations in the forces of West Mercia and West Midlands, and at Edmonton station in the Metropolitan police. An independent evaluation will be completed in the spring of 1992. Further action will depend on consideration of this evaluation and will take into account the fact that this is an issue which falls within the terms of reference of the Royal Commission on criminal justice.

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the revenue forgone by the provision of a concessionary television licence to people living in sheltered housing in certain circumstances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is estimated that about £40 million per year is forgone as a result of the concessionary licence scheme.

South Yorkshire Police

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable on the locations in South Yorkshire, where potential high-risk crime victims have been issued with free mobile telephones by the South Yorkshire police force; and if he will show in his answer how many have been distributed per location.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This pioneering scheme, called Safelink, has been devised by the South Yorkshire police and is sponsored by Vodafone Ltd., which is providing 16 portable pre-programmed mobile telephones free of charge on a one-year trial basis. Fifteen of the telephones are currently issued to high-risk victims of crime so that they can contact the police quickly if they feel threatened; seven are located in Sheffield, three in Doncaster, two in Barnsley and one each in Bolton-on-Dearne, Rotherham and Stocksbridge.

Muslim Parliament

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had from the Muslim Parliament; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have received no direct representations from the self-styled Muslim Parliament.

As the reaction of many other Muslims has shown, this body is not representative of Muslims generally in this country. We will continue to maintain close contacts with other Muslim bodies which make representations to us against the background of respect for the rule of law. Britain is a diverse and tolerant society, but we cannot accept any form of separatism nor any attempts to incite the community to civil disobedience.

Extradition

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests for extradition of citizens of countries with which the United Kingdom has no reciprocal extradition treaty arrangements have been made by the British Government in each of the past 10 years; how many have been successful; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The United Kingdom has made two extradition requests in the past 10 years to countries with which no formal extradition arrangements have been concluded, in 1987 and 1989. One person returned voluntarily before the request could be considered; the other could not be found.

Royal Commission on Criminal Justice

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Royal Commission on criminal justice to report.

Mr. John Patten: When it was established in March 1991, the Royal Commission on criminal justice was asked to make every effort to complete its work within two years. It held its first meeting in June 1991 and we understand that it is seeking to adhere to the two-year timetable.

Criminal Records

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the crimes for which records are kept indefinitely by police; and if he will indicate the kinds of data held in such records.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Crime information collected by police forces, and the length of time it is kept, are matters for chief officers to determine. The Association of Chief Police Officers has published a code of practice for police computer systems which provides guidelines for the review and removal of data. A copy of the code is in the Library.

The code recommends that detected crime reports should normally be kept for no longer than six years,

except where legal proceedings, appeals or reviews are still pending at the end of that period. Reports of undetected crime should normally be kept for no longer than 10 years, unless relating to serious crime such as homicide, assaults causing serious injury, rape, buggery, kidnapping; serious cases of arson, robbery and burglary; and criminal use of firearms and explosives. These reports should be reviewed every five years thereafter.

Mrs. Ahmed Yusuf Mako

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision on the application for refugee status made in October 1989 by Mrs. Ahmed Yusuf Mako, reference A450605.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mrs. Mako's application is now under consideration, and we expect to reach a decision shortly.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many high-risk category A prisoners there were in prisons in England and Wales on 31 December 1991; of what offences these people had been convicted; and how long each of these prisoners had spent, up to 31 December 1991, as high-risk category A prisoners.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 31 December 1991 there were 106 high-risk category A prisoners in custody in England and Wales. This figure includes convicted and sentenced prisoners, unconvicted (remand) prisoners, and convicted prisoners awaiting sentence. A range of offences is involved including murder, robbery and offences associated with terrorism. Information on time spent as high risk category A prisoners is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long high-risk category A has been in operation as a category in prisons in England and Wales; and how many prisoners in total have been placed in this category since it came into being.

Mrs. Rumbold: The classification of prisoners as high-risk category A was introduced in its present form in 1988. Other information in the form requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average length of time that prisoners remain as high-risk category A prisoner.

Mrs. Rumbold: Information in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what difference in treatment results as a consequence of prisoners being categorised as high-risk category A.

Mrs. Rumbold: In maximum security (dispersal) prisons, the difference in treatment between category A high-risk prisoners and those at standard risk is apparant only in the supervision arrangements for receiving visitors. Visits involving high-risk inmates are more closely supervised. Where high-risk prisoners are held in local prisons, additional security measures may be applied according to local circumstances. When a high-risk category A prisoner is taken outside an establishment, additional escort measures may be applied according to circumstances at the time.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amount spent on advertising the rights of overseas voters under the Representation of the People Act 1989 for each financial year at current prices, plus the amount projected for expenditure in the current year.

Mrs. Rumbold: Spending on advertising the rights of overseas voters under the Representation of the People Act 1989 occurred only in the financial year 1990-91. The sum involved was £705,000 (£691,000[1] at current prices). No advertising expenditure is planned in the current financial year.

[1] Source of Media Inflation Index: Advertising Association Press/TV and DMB & B estimate.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve levels of electoral registration prior to the 1992 general election; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have already undertaken a number of steps to support electoral registration officers in their task of compiling an accurate register for 1992, as in previous years. We conducted a nation-wide advertising campaign designed to encourage people to register, and produced publicity material aimed at encouraging young people to register. Research continued into the working methods of electoral registration officers, and the results were used to inform guidance and advice to registration officers.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amounts spent on advertising for electoral registration for each financial year from 1979 at current prices, plus the amount projected for expenditure in the current year.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is given in the table:

	Actual figure £	*Current price*[1] £
1979-80	47,000	122,000
1980-81	nil	n/a
1981-82	80,000	151,000
1982-83	87,000	145,000
1983-84	102,000	157,000
1984-85	132,000	194,000
1985-86	152,000	204,000
1986-87	588,000	709,000
1987-88	257,000	279,000
1988-89	457,000	480,000
1989-90	452,000	450,000
1990-91	923,000	905,000
1991-92	627,000	627,000

[1] Source of media inflation index: Advertising Association Press/TV, and DMB and B estimate.

n/a—not applicable.

Note: All figures are rounded to nearest £1,000.

The electoral registration budget for the financial year 1992-93 is £642,000.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the amount spent on electoral registration *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* by local authorities in the years (i) 1988-89, (ii) 1989-90 (iii) 1990-91 and (iv) 1991-92, respectively, showing also the figures at 1988-89 prices.

Mrs. Rumbold: Details of local authority spending on electoral registration are not held centrally and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Details of Home Office spending, on advertising and publicity, is as follows:

	Actual figure	*1988-89 price*[1]
	£	£
1988-89	472,000	472,000
1989-90	481,000	456,000
1990-91	1,070,000	998,000
1991-92	647,000	616,000

[1] Source of Media Inflation Index: Advertising Association Press/TV and DMB & B estimate.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what expenditure has been incurred by his Department on the electoral registration of expatriate voters; and what are the numbers who have registered to vote in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Rumbold: Advertising campaigns to inform British citizens living abroad of their voting rights were undertaken in 1986, when the overseas franchise was introduced by the Representation of the People Act 1985; and in 1990, upon the extension of the qualifying period from five to 20 years, under the Representation of the People Act 1989. The total costs were £279,000 and £705,000 respectively.

There are 34,454 overseas electors on the 1991-92 electoral register.

Motorists (Assault Charges)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest available annual figure of motorists who have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of, assault against (i) pedestrians, (ii) cyclists and (iii) other motorists (1) in the Metropolitan police area of London and (2) for England and Wales; and if he will also give these figures for the preceding nine years.

Mr. John Patten: Information held centrally does not distinguish motorists from others charged or convicted of assaults.

Police Traffic Departments

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest available annual figure of civilian staff working in police traffic departments *(a)* in the Metropolitan police area of London and *(b)* for England and Wales; and if he will give the figures for the preceding nine years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table gives numbers of traffic wardens for the years 1982 to 1990. Other civilian support staff assigned by the Metropolitan police to its traffic division are also shown, from the earliest available year. Information on civilian staff in traffic divisions, other than traffic wardens, for provincial forces is not available centrally.

	Metropolitan police		
As at 31 December	*Civil staff*	*Traffic wardens*	*Provincial forces*[2]
1982	[1]—	1,474	3,123
1983	[1]—	1,787	3,127
1984	[1]—	1,830	3,030
1985	[1]—	1,701	3,068
1986	[1]—	1,689	3,104
1987	150	1,539	3,215
1988	142	1,442	3,208
1989	139	1,338	3,266
1990	115	1,436	3,372
1991	114	1,659	[1]—

[1] Information is not available for these years.
[2] Includes the City of London police.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the latest available annual figure of police traffic officers *(a)* in the Metropolitan police area of London and *(b)* for England and Wales; and if he will give the figures for the preceding nine years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is available centrally only from 1986 for provincial forces, and from 1987 for the Metropolitan police, and relates to officers deployed full time on traffic duties. Details are given in the table.

As at 31 December	*Metropolitan police*	*Provincial forces*[1]
1986	n/a	8,355
1987	753	8,154
1988	761	7,898
1989	787	7,834
1990	819	7,930
1991	820	n/a

[1] Includes the City of London police.

Motorists (Criminal Charges)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest available annual figures of motorists who have been *(a)* charged with and *(b)* convicted of (i) failure to accord precedence at zebra and pedestrian crossings, (ii) failure to stop at a red or amber traffic light, (iii) speeding, (iv) drunken driving, (v) illegal use of bus lanes and (vi) reckless driving respectively, (1) in the Metropolitan police area of London and (2) for England and Wales; and if he will also give these figures for the preceding nine years.

Mr. John Patten: Information held centrally does not distinguish offences of illegal use of bus lanes from other offences of neglect of traffic directions.

Complete information on the other offences is readily available only for 1987 to 1989 and is as follows:

Number of proceedings and findings of guilt for certain motoring offences in England and Wales and the Metropolitan Police District 1987-1989

Year and offence	Proceedings		Findings of guilt	
	England and Wales	Metropolitan Police	England and Wales	Metropolitan Police
1987				
Neglect of pedestrian rights (endorseable offences[1])	20,283	5,788	18,778	5,506
Failing to comply with traffic sign[2]	20,665	6,167	17,189	5,711
Speed limit offences	170,363	21,432	163,916	21,104
Driving etc after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	130,533	22,693	115,097	18,583
Reckless driving	6,954	500	5,010	405
1988				
Neglect of pedestrian rights (endorseable offences[1])	18,825	5,489	17,143	5,209
Failing to comply with traffic sign[2]	21,928	6,235	18,370	5,685
Speed limit offences	173,321	18,441	166,129	18,026
Driving etc after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	135,825	24,110	119,033	19,590
Reckless driving	8,763	621	6,470	554
1989				
Neglect of pedestrian rights (endorseable offences[1])	15,771	3,431	14,125	3,169
Failing to comply with traffic sign[2]	20,726	3,505	17,014	3,053
Speed limit offences	172,985	10,788	164,282	10,253
Driving etc after consuming alcohol or taking drugs	129,122	20,731	114,347	17,278
Reckless driving	9,654	643	6,964	604

[1] Includes also offences of neglect of pedestrian rights in controlled areas, on pelican crossings, in playstreets etc in addition to zebra and pedestrian crossings.
[2] Includes also offences of failing to comply with traffic signs, stop signs and double white lines etc in addition to traffic lights.

The information for 1990 and 1991 is not yet available. Information on findings of guilt only for the last three offence categories shown in the above table for the years 1980 to 1986 may be found in "Offences relating to motor vehicles, England and Wales", supplementary tables. Copies of each year's volumes are in the Library.

Prison Dog Service

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the restructuring of the prison dog service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: An internal review of the organisation of the prison dog service was commissioned during 1991 from the prison department management services group. It has recently submitted a draft of its final report and this is currently being considered within the prison service headquarters.

Wolds Prison

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what mechanisms exist permitting Group 4 to vary the contract price in respect of the Wolds prison should the inmate population exceed its normal level for a sustained period of time.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government's contract with Group 4 Remand Services Ltd. for the management of Wolds remand prison provides for variations to be made to the services required of Group 4, and for such fair and reasonable adjustments to be made to the payment under the contract as may be attributable to the variations made. Such variations could include changes to the level of occupancy.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps Group 4 is required to take to ensure that the levels of *(a)* medical care, *(b)* diet and *(c)* education standards in the Wolds prison are sufficient to meet the needs of the prisoners.

Mrs. Rumbold: The requirements placed on Group 4 Remand Services Ltd. as to the level of medical care, diet and education which it is to provide at Wolds remand prison are set out in the specification for the operation of the prison, a copy of which was placed in the Library on 2 May 1991.

Naturalisation

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current backlog of applications for naturalisation under section 6 of the British Nationality Act 1981.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As at 16 January 1992, the number of applications for naturalisation awaiting determination was 41,194, of which 3,431 were complete but for the applicants swearing at oath or making an affirmation of allegiance or were waiting for the issue of a certificate.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for naturalisation are awaiting interview by the Metropolitan police; and what is the date of the earliest applicant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As at 16 January 1992, there were 734 applications for naturalisation referred to the Metropolitan police for interview which were awaiting return to the Home Office. Of these, the earliest date of application is 18 August 1986.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Insolvency

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by year, for the last 10 years, the number of companies his Department has referred to the High Court to be wound up due to trading while insolvent.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State has generally no power to present a winding up petition solely on the basis of insolvent trading. However, following inquiries under the Companies Acts 1985 and 1989, the Insurance Company Act 1982, the Financial Services Act 1986 or the Criminal Justice Act 1987 if it appears that it is expedient in the public interest to do so, he may presen. a petition for a company to be wound up. The table lists the number of winding-up orders made on petitions presented by the Secretary of State for each of the last 10 years.

Number of companies wound up on the petition of the Secretary of State

	Number
1981	16
1982	2
1983	18
1984	21
1985	21
1986-87[1]	40
1987-88	22
1988-89	16
1989-90	19
1990-91	27

[1] 1 January 1986 to 31 March 1987.

Postal Services

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what is the status of the Green Paper on the development of the single market for postal services;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Green Paper on the development of the single market for postal services.

Mr. Leigh: I understand that the EC Commission currently expects to publish its Green Paper on European postal services within the next few weeks. As soon as copies are available, I shall place one in the Library.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy with regard to the continuation of a door-to-door postal service throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Leigh: As the citizens charter White Paper made clear, the Government are fully committed to the continued provision of letter services which serve all the United Kingdom's 24 million addresses.

Mint and Boxed

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Queen's award for export achievement was given to the company Mint and Boxed; and what was the value of that award to the company.

Mr. Redwood: The Queen's award was granted to the company on 21 April 1991. The award does not involve any monetary prize.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he became aware of possible financial irregularities at the company Mint and Boxed; whether he has been asked to use his powers under the Companies Act 1985 to investigate that company; and whether any investigation is under way.

Mr Redwood: The possible financial irregularities were brought to the attention of my Department in July 1991. This matter is currently being investigated by the police and it would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

Insolvency Service

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff were employed in the Insolvency Service in the years 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Redwood: The number of staff in post in the Insolvency Service at 31 December in the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 was as follows:

	1989	*1990*	*1991*
Permanent	1,372·5	1,441·5	1,511·5
Casual	14·0	30·5	111·0
Total	1,386·5	1,472·0	1,622·5

Liechtenstein (Companies)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the amounts recovered in each of the past four years by *(a)* the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, *(b)* provisional liquidators, *(c)* administrators and *(d)* receivers appointed in connection with private companies from companies based in Liechtenstein.

Mr. Redwood: I have no such information.

Liquidators

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what review and assessment he has undertaken of the adequacy of the supervision and control of the level of fees charged by liquidators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Prior to 1986 there were complaints from creditors that there was inadequate knowledge of the basis on which liquidators' fees were calculated and that it was therefore difficult to challenge the amount of them. The Insolvency Act sets out how remuneration should be calculated and makes provision for the supervision and control of that remuneration by creditors, either through a liquidation committee or in general meeting. I am anxious that creditors take steps to exercise that control which includes the power to make application to the court for an order to reduce remuneration which they consider excessive. Where creditors do not resolve on the matter, remuneration may be taken equivalent only to that payable where an official receiver acts as liquidator.

TRANSPORT

Car Safety

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide information on current car rear seat belt wearing levels for adults and children separately and for all rear seat occupants for *(a)* all cars and *(b)* cars manufactured after October 1987.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Rear seat passengers:
Percentage wearing seat belts—October 1991 survey

	All cars	Post-1987 cars (Registration E prefix and later)
Adults	41	58
Children under 14 years of age	79	88
All	63	76

London Underground (Safety)

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to receive the report by the Health and Safety Executive on London Underground Ltd.'s quantified risk assessment methodology.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the Health and Safety Executive is currently in possession of the latest updated risk assessment work from London Underground Ltd.. The HSE is awaiting LUL's supporting executive summary which will be available by 24 January and on receipt of this, it will then provide a report as soon as possible.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Underground fires have been reported to the London fire brigade in each of the quarters since 1 April 1990, distinguishing between incidents dealt with by the fire brigade, incidents dealt with by London Underground's own staff before the fire brigade arrived, and cases where no cause or source of fire was found by either London Underground staff or the fire brigade.

Mr. Freeman: I understand from London Underground that the information is as follows:

Incidents	Dealt with by London Fire Brigade		Dealt with by London Underground Ltd.		No cause or source found	
	1990-91	1991-92	1990-91	1991-92	1990-91	1991-92
First quarter	134	88	721	265	1,237	860
Second quarter	103	88	187	281	1,411	768
Third quarter	66	39	124	155	1,194	652
Fourth quarter	88	—	167	—	1,100	—
TOTAL	391	215	1,199	701	4,942	2,280

These figures show that the general trend in the number of incidents is decreasing.

Tyre Laws

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to extend the new tyre laws and the MOT test to cover spare tyres and to make it mandatory for all vehicles to carry a spare wheel.

Mr. Chope: There is no legal requirement for a car to carry a spare wheel, although manufacturers supply them in almost all cases. If used on the vehicle, they must comply with the Construction and Use Regulations (SI 1986 No. 1078 (as amended)), which include the new tread depth requirements. Bearing in mind that supply is practically standard on new cars, and that punctures are now relatively rare, I have no plans to make carrying a spare wheel compulsory.

The MOT test does not apply to matters not subject to the Construction and Use Regulations, and consequently does not apply to the carrying of spare wheels. I have no plans to alter this arrangement.

British Rail (Performance Standards)

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hampshire, North-West of 19 December, *Official Report* column *239*, if he will make a statement setting out the performance standard for British Rail on its services from Grateley, Andover, Whitchurch, Overton and Basingstoke which, if not achieved, will trigger compensation payments by British Rail to season ticket holders.

Mr. Freeman: The individual performance targets for each of the fifteen route groups of Network SouthEast and the related compensation arrangements will be set out in the BR passengers charter shortly. Monitoring of performance already occurs and the targets will apply from January 1992.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds for England and Wales on restrictions placed on privately hired buses and coaches making use of designated bus lanes and traffic light filters for buses.

Mr. Freeman: Traffic orders governing the use of bus lanes and signals on local roads are the responsibility of local highway authorities. At present the measures would normally not include coaches or private hire vehicles unless specifically signed. No central records of such local regulations are kept.

Pedestrian Crossings

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last discussed with the police and traffic authorities the need to take measures to enforce motorists' respect for pedestrian rights at zebra and pelican crossings.

Mr. Chope: The Department meets regularly with the police and highway authorities to consider traffic and pedestrian issues. Pedestrian crossing facilities are being reviewed.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give annual figures for road deaths for the last 10 years for which figures are available including the number of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults who have been hit by cars on or near pedestrian crossings in (i) the Metropolitan police area of London and (ii) England and Wales.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is given in the table:

Child and adult deaths when hit by cars on or near pedestrian crossings in the Metropolitan police area of London, and England and Wales, 1981-90

	Metropolitan		England and Wales	
	Child	Adult	Child	Adult
1981				
On crossing	2	25	5	65
Within zig-zag lines	1	17	1	18
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	—	—	8	36
1982				
On crossing	4	23	8	66
Within zig-zag lines	—	2	—	7
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	3	13	10	52
1983				
On crossing	2	22	6	63
Within zig-zag lines	—	—	1	8
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	3	22	14	66
1984				
On crossing	1	22	6	58
Within zig-zag lines	—	3	2	6
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	3	29	10	84
1985				
On crossing	2	21	7	57
Within zig-zag lines	1	2	2	5
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	2	16	10	63
1986				
On crossing	6	27	9	84
Within zig-zag lines	—	3	—	5
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	—	28	10	88
1987				
On crossing	—	24	5	70
Within zig-zag lines	—	2	—	10
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	1	20	14	79
1988				
On crossing	2	23	11	64
Within zig-zag lines	1	4	1	11
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	5	21	10	77
1989				
On crossing	1	12	8	57
Within zig-zag lines	—	1	—	10
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	2	26	9	94
1990				
On crossing	1	20	6	62
Within zig-zag lines	—	3	1	13
Elsewhere within 50 metres of crossing	—	14	10	54

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will seek to amend the law to increase the distance at which motorists are required to stop at zebra crossings.

Mr. Chope: This distance is given in regulation 5 (schedule 3) of the "Zebra" Pedestrian Crossing Regulations 1971 and has proved to be satisfactory in practice. I have no proposals to amend these regulations.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds for England and Wales on *(a)* the numbers of outstanding applications for pelican or zebra crossings and *(b)* the time taken for applications to be processed.

Mr. Chope: The installation of zebra and pelican crossings is a matter for the local highway authority. Most crossings are on local authority roads. Application to the Secretary of State is not necessary and central records are not held.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will update departmental standard TD 4/79 "Pelican Crossings: Pelican Crossing Operation" to increase the amount of time for pedestrians to cross the road.

Mr. Chope: Departmental standard TD 4/79 was amended by departmental standard TD 28/87 and a copy is in the Library. The time for pedestrians to cross the road was increased then.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received the report from the Transport and Road Research Laboratory on new techniques to identify sites for pelican crossings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: TRRL has recently published two reports: on delays to pedestrians while waiting to cross the road, and on accidents to pedestrians at or near zebra and

pelican crossings. These are being used to formulate policy for crossings including the identification of suitable sites for pelican crossings.

Cyclists (Accidents)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest available annual reported figure of cyclists who have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in road traffic accidents in (i) the Metropolitan police area of London and (ii) for England and Wales; and if he will also give these figures for the preceding nine years.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is given in the table.

Pedal cyclist casualties in the Metropolitan police area of London, and England and Wales: 1981-1990

Year	Metropolitan		England and Wales	
	Killed	Injured	Killed	Injured
1981	34	4,495	290	23,538
1982	26	5,615	278	26,403
1983	32	5,483	299	28,606
1984	30	5,045	329	28,760
1985	28	4,426	272	25,146
1986	20	4,289	252	24,415
1987	29	4,265	266	24,380
1988	28	4,361	221	24,233
1989	34	5,436	278	26,687
1990	21	4,774	239	24,756

Plutonium (Transport)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details about the last consignment of plutonium that was flown from a United Kingdom airport to *(a)* another airport in the United Kingdom and *(b)* an airport abroad, including (i) dates of transit, (ii) quantities and (iii) destinations; and what is his policy in respect of allowing future such consignments to be transported by air.

Mr. McLoughlin: The policy is that all transport of radioactive materials to and from the United Kingdom shall comply with the International Atomic Energy Agency regulations.

Only in certain cases do movements of radioactive material have to be notified to my Department.

Traffic Lights

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of his Department's trials into new pedestrian facilities at traffic-signalled junctions including the use of infra-red devices to detect the presence and movement of pedestrians.

Mr. Chope: I hope to do so shortly.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress on the siting of video cameras at traffic lights.

Mr. Chope: Automatic cameras have been installed at a number of traffic light controlled junctions in various parts of the country and more are being installed.

Thameslink

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), of 6 December, *Official Report*, column 234, if he will set out the reasons for which the Government concluded that British Rail's proposed private Bill on Thameslink was premature.

Mr. Freeman: The Thameslink 2000 scheme has a substantial funding requirement and there are many other investment projects which will be competing for British Rail's resources over the next few years. It is not clear that this scheme should take priority. In the light of this, my right hon. and learned Friend considered that it would be premature to seek powers to take forward the project before proper consideration had been given to all the competing claims for the available resources in the context of British Rail's corporate plan.

Pavements

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to monitor the provisions of the Road Traffic Act 1990 with respect to the condition of pavements.

Mr. Chope *[pursuant to his answer, 17 January 1992, Official Report, col. 657]:* I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the street works provisions of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991. These provide, in sections 71 and 139, for reinstatements of the street (including pavements) following street works to comply with prescribed specifications of materials and standards of workmanship. The Government have commissioned consultants to advise on appropriate arrangments for monitoring the effects of the Act.

Utilities' Street Works

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what consultations he has had with representatives of local authorities concerning procedures for carrying out the inspection of utilities streetworks.

Mr. Chope *[pursuant to his answer, 17 January 1992, Official Report, col. 657]:* On 31 December 1991 my Department wrote to local authority associations and other interested organisations to consult them about draft regulations and a draft non-statutory code of practice on various aspects of the arrangements for inspection of undertakers' street works. The draft code of practice was prepared by a joint committee of local authorities' and undertakers' representatives.

Cliff Rescues

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give figures showing the number and location per sector of incidents relating to the use of cliff rescue equipment by Her Majesty's coastguard service between Montrose and Easthaven.

Mr. McLoughlin: The figures for 1989, 1990 and 1991 are as follows:

1989—Three incidents recorded:

Person with suspected broken leg recovered by Arbroath RNLI inshore lifeboat. Cliff team in attendance.

Girl with suspected broken ankle recovered by cliff team from top of cliffs at Carlen Heugh Bay.

Helicopter lifted boy with head injuries from cliffs at Auchmithie. Cliff team in attendance.

1990—Two incidents recorded:

Search for missing person along cliffs north of Arbroath. Nothing found.

Sector officer investigated sighting of a motor bike at the foot of cliffs at Auchmithie. False alarm.

1991—One incident recorded:
Person down cliff 3 miles NE of Arbroath. Both Arbroath and Montrose cliff teams assisted in the person's recovery by helicopter.

Trust Ports

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what directions he has given regarding the disclosure of information relating to bids for trust ports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend has made no such formal directions. However, officials of the Department wrote recently to the chairmen of those trust ports currently seeking privatisation asking them to delay making any public announcement of their board's recommendation as to the successful bidder for the port until my right hon. and learned Friend had had an opportunity of considering the recommendation and of deciding whether to give his consent. This was because my right hon. and learned Friend might not give his consent to a recommendation; and, if he did not, it would be misleading and unhelpful to the bidders for the board to have announced its recommendation publicly. The Department has not attempted to prevent bidders from making public information about their own bids.

ENVIRONMENT

Community Charge

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the amount raised by community charge equalisation—the amount raised through the community charge for giving to the less well-off local authorities; and whether there are any arrears with any local authority failing to provide the money so raised.

Mr. Key: There are no provisions requiring any amounts collected by way of community charge in one area to be transferred to less well-off authorities in other areas.

Housing Grants

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the level of grant under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985 is expected to be for the current year.

Mr. Yeo: The Department of the Environment is providing £4·5 million in section 73 grants to voluntary organisations throughout England in 1991-92. This will rise to £6·1 million in 1992-93—an increase of around 30 per cent. in real terms. Local authorities also have powers to give grants under section 73, but they are not required to report on these to the Department.

Town and Parish Councils

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of town and parish councils following his consultations on unitary authorities.

Mr. Key: We believe that parish and town councils merit further consideration, particularly in the light of the many suggestions for their role in a world of unitary authorities.

We have received the results of a survey by Aston university of the existing role of parish and town councils and will publish its final report shortly. We are commissioning further work which will provide a detailed picture of the organisation, management and resources of selected parish and town councils.

This research will feed into our deliberations on the future role of local councils, and we shall consider whether to produce a further consultation paper about it.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the work and powers of parish and town councils for consideration in his consultation on unitary authorities.

Mr. Key: In response to our consultation paper "The Structure of Local Government in England" we received 1,106 representations mentioning the role and functions of parish and town councils. Copies of the responses have been placed in the House Library.

Tyre Recycling Plant, Wolverhampton

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now approve a city grant for the Elm Energy and Recycling (UK) Ltd. proposed site for a tyre recycling plant in Wolverhampton; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Department are currently appraising an application for city grant to develop a tyre recycling plant and a decision on the proposal will be made as soon as possible.

Green Alliance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 12 December, columns *494-5*, if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting with the Green Alliance by officials of his Department and others on 13 December, to which he makes a reference.

Mr. Baldry: Officials representing 11 Departments met the author of the Green Alliance report "Greening Government" on 13 December to discuss ways of improving environmental coverage in the 1992 departmental reports. It was a very fruitful meeting and the recommendations from it have been passed to those Departments who were unable to attend. We intend such interdepartmental meetings of the "green guardians" in Departments to be a regular feature of the Government's implementation of its environmental strategy as set out in the White Paper "This Common Inheritance".

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his final report on the local authority financial settlement for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend expects to publish the reports on the local government financial settlement shortly.

Departmental Permanent Secretary

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he is making with the appointment of a new Permanent Secretary at his Department.

Mr. Heseltine: An appointment will be made in due course.

Departmental Debts

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy towards prompt payment of departmental debts to small firms.

Mr. Heseltine: It is the policy of my Department to ensure that payments, including those to small firms, are made promptly within the period stipulated in the appropriate contract or within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice.

My Department is conscious of the cash flow problems that small firms may encounter if the payment of valid invoices is not made promptly and my officials monitor payment performance and make regular returns to the Department of Employment which intend to publish them in due course.

Self-build Projects

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what initiatives his Department has undertaken to encourage self-build projects.

Mr. Yeo: The Housing Association has a statutory responsibility to promote and assist self-build societies. It provides general advice on how to set up a group and on the use of consultants. The Housing Corporation has recently introduced a pilot programme of grants to enable self-build groups to buy their homes on shared ownership terms. Subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, local

Urban Regeneration

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give a breakdown of the Government's urban regeneration expenditure by category of expenditure for each year since 1980 in constant prices.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* Under the Action for Cities initiative several Government Departments are making a substantial contribution to urban regeneration, through a wide range of programmes. Since 1980, my own Department's urban group of programmes has spent as follows:

	Outturn prices (£ million)	*At 1991-92 constant prices*
1981-82	162	290
1982-83	283	473
1983-84	325	520
1984-85	[1]450	685
1985-86	436	629
1986-87	429	599
1987-88	483	640
1988-89	555	683
1989-90	[2]756	878
1990-91	895	958
[3]1991-92	604	884

[1] Includes for 1984-85 onwards other Government Departments' contributions to the Urban Programme.
[2] Includes City Action Teams from 1989-90 onwards.
[3] (estimated).

Individual programme expenditure for 1991-92 is as follows:

	£ million estimated outturn
Urban Programme	242·4
City Grant[1]	55·5
Derelict Land Grant	75·6
Urban Development Corporations	501·5
City Action Teams	8·1
Research	0·8
Total	884

[1] Includes Urban Development Grant.

Programme information for previous years is available in relevant public expenditure White Papers and Departments' 1991 annual reports.

Urban Funding

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of urban funding, in money terms and percentage terms, went to each standard region in 1990-91.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* In 1990-91, my Department provided specific resources under its urban group of programmes to each region as follows:

	1990-91	
	£ million	*Percentage total*
Northern	136·8	14·90
North West[1]	99·5	10·90
Merseyside	67·0	7·30
West Midlands	99·4	10·80
East Midlands	28·7	3·10
Yorkshire and Humberside	80·6	8·80
London	385·8	42·10
South West	17·6	1·90
South East[2]	0·2	0·02
Eastern[2]	0·5	0·05

[1] DoE Region excludes Merseyside.
[2] Derelict Land Grant only.

Royal Parks

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of companies short listed for the maintenance contract for each of the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* We will be publishing the names of the successful contractors for the royal parks garden and landscape maintenance contracts shortly. However, the names on the select tender list are commercial in confidence and will not therefore be published.

Right to Buy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to propose amendments to housing law such that all local authority tenants entitled to the right-to-buy, who are offered transfers to an assured tenancy with a housing association, must be informed of their loss of entitlement to the right-to-buy on acceptance of such a transfer, and must be financially compensated if information on the loss of right-to-buy entitlement is not provided by the housing association prior to the signing of their transfer acceptance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 17 January 1992]:* No. Local authority tenants whose homes are transferred to a housing association have their right to buy preserved. A local authority tenant who moves to a different property owned by a housing association will be offered an assured tenancy which does not carry the right to buy, but the tenants guarantee issued by the Housing Corporation under section 36A of the Housing Associations Act 1985 calls on the association to explain this.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the financial years *(a)* 1989-90, *(b)* 1990-91, *(c)* 1991-92, *(d)* 1992-93, and *(e)* 1993-94 actual or projected expenditure on (i) print and (ii) audio visual media advertising by UK Nirex Ltd.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply. This is a management matter for the company.

SCOTLAND

Emissions

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish information on the *(a)* gross and *(b)* per capita emissions in Scotland of (i) agricultural CH_4, (ii) non-agricultural CH_4, (iii) CO_2 from land use change and (iv) CO_2 from industrial usage.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Merionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 20 December 1991.

Ewes

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether enzootic abortion in ewes is a notifiable disease; what criteria is applied to the notification of diseases tested by the Veterinary Investigation Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Enzootic abortion in ewes is not a notifiable disease either in the United Kingdom or the European Community. The main criteria applied to the categorisation of a disease as notifiable are that national action is needed to control or eradicate it and that its uncontrolled spread among farm animals could be severely detrimental in economic, trade or public health terms.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the confirmed cases of BSE in Scotland *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* before 1991 on a regional basis.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information for Scotland is set out in the table.

Region	*Cases confirmed before 1991*	*Cases confirmed during 1991 (provisional)*
Borders	35	50
Central	24	19
Dumfries	164	183
Fife	53	29
Grampian	158	109
Highland	48	30
Lothian	20	11
Orkney	10	3
Shetland	3	—
Strathclyde	231	155
Tayside	67	41
Western Isles	1	—

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the location, including the region, of the incinerators which dispose of BSE-infected cattle that are currently operating in Scotland and in each case give the potential capacity and actual capacity for through put each week of infected cattle; whether he has plans to introduce new incinerators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are eight incinerators which dispose of BSE-infected cattle currently in Scotland. They are located at Aberdeen (Grampian), Ayr, (Strathclyde), Edinburgh (Lothian), Inverness (Highland), Kirkwall (Orkney), Lerwick (Shetland), Perth (Tayside) and St Boswells (Borders).

My right hon. Friend is satisfied that these provide enough capacity to incinerate all suspect BSE carcases, and has no plans to introduce new incinerators.

Sheep HLCA

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will add a 50p premium to the sheep hill livestock compensatory allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We will announce the rates for the 1992 HLCA scheme as soon as possible.

Foresterhill Hospital

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the costs incurred by Grampian health board as a result of the application by management at Foresterhill hospital unit for trust status; and if he will provide a breakdown of the costs by each identifiable category.

Mr. Lang: I refer to the replies given to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) at col. *339*.

WALES

Swansea Council (Expenditure)

13. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the leaders of Swansea city council to discuss council spending.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Council spending is discussed at the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, a meeting of which my right hon. Friend chaired on 13 January.

Labour Statistics

14. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the level of unemployment in Wales in *(a)* November/December 1981, *(b)* November/December 1986 and *(c)* currently.

Mr. David Hunt: In December 1981, 1986 and 1991, the levels of seasonally adjusted unemployment in Wales were 136,000, 162,000 and 121,600 respectively.

Maastricht Agreements

15. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will next meet European Commissioner Millan to discuss the effect on the economy of Wales of the agreements reached at Maastricht.

Mr. David Hunt: I was due to meet Commissioner Millan this morning but due to illness he has unfortunately had to cancel his visit to Wales.

Inward Investment

16. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the value of inward investment in Wales since 1979.

Mr. David Hunt: Based on information provided by companies at the time of their decision to invest, 575 overseas investment projects have been recorded since 1979 promising over 71,000 new and safeguarded jobs and capital investment in excess of £3 billion. These excellent figures do not include investment from elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Economic Prospects

17. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for the Welsh economy during 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: The essential ingredients for recovery are in place—we have low inflation rates, lower interest rates and rising real incomes. I am confident that the diversified nature of the Welsh economy, together with our success in attracting investment from both home and abroad, will ensure that Wales will emerge from the recession in a strong position.

Homelessness

18. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the latest number of homeless persons in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of people within households accepted as homeless by housing authorities in Wales under the Housing Act 1985 in the third quarter of 1991 was 6,156.

Housing Opportunities

19. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about new housing opportunities for the people of Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The agenda for Action for Housing in Wales, published last November, sets firm objectives and clear targets for encouraging home ownership, creating greater diversity of choice and supply in the rented sector and for improving the quality of both the housing stock and the levels of occupants.

General Practitioners (Targets)

20. **Mr. Grist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of general practitioners in Wales are meeting the *(a)* higher and *(b)* lower targets for children's immunisation, pre-school boosters and for cervical cytology tests.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The latest date for which figures are available reflect payments made to general practitioners on 1 April 1991.

	Higher target payment per cent.	*Lower target payment per cent.*
Children's immunisation	41	36
Pre-school boosters	30	33
Cervical cytology tests	42	49

Rural Rental Housing

21. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many houses to rent he expects to be built as part of his rural initiative; and how many he expects to be built for purchase.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I expect the investment we propose to make in rural housing in 1992-93 to lead to at least 1,225 new units. It is for local authorities in consultation with Housing for Wales and other partners, to determine the mix between homes for rent and homes for purchase.

Cataract Operations

22. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the contractual number of cataract operations funded by his Department at the treatment centre in Bridgend for the current financial year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: For the available period in 1991-92 the Department's contract with the ophthalmic treatment centre at Bridgend general hospital is for a minimum of 275 cataract and 25 other ophthalmic operations.

Cardiac Services

23. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of cardiac services in south-west Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer to the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 13 January.

Rechem International

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what dates in the last 10 years Rechem International exceeded its consent discharge limit for polychlorinated biphenyls into the public sewer; and if he will specify what the excess levels were in each instance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

Traffic Speed Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress there has been with the use of 20 mph speed limits on Welsh residential roads; what review he has made of the procedures involved; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A circular was issued in April 1991, to all local highway authorities in Wales, giving guidance on the use of 20 mph speed limit zones and a number are considering suitable areas. Before making the necessary orders they are required to obtain the Secretary of State's consent. I am not aware of any problems with the procedures and await the first application.

Trawsfynydd Lake (Radiation)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the results of the MAFF fisheries inspectorate monitoring with respect to the annual external and internal organ lifetime permitted internal radiation doses received by anglers who use and live near Trawsfynydd lake.

Mr. David Hunt: The current annual dose limit to members of the public recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP) is 1 millisievert (mSv) per year. No distinction is made between external and internal sources, both components being included if relevant. When setting the limts for doses, ICRP recognises that radionuclides taken into the body may remain there for different periods.

For 1990, the fisheries radiological inspectorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has calculated the following estimated dose rates for the most highly exposed group of local anglers at Trawsfynydd; 0·07 mSV from the consumption of fish caught in the lake (internal); 0·01 mSv from the inhalation of airborne sediment (internal); and 0·02 mSv from occupancy of the lakeside (external) making a total of 0·10 mSv to members of this group in 1990. This total is well within the internationally recommended safety limit of 1 mSv per year referred to in my reply of 18 December at columns *357-38*.

Health Service Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 3 December 1991, *Official Report*, columns *99-100*, if he will publish figures for NHS expenditure for Wales after adjustments for NHS pay and prices have been taken into consideration.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 17 December at columns *137-38*.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of those currently unemployed in Wales are under 25 years of age; what was the corresponding figure for 1971 and 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: In October 1991 32·3 per cent. of all unemployment claimants in Wales were under 25 years of age. The earliest comparable month for which data are available is October 1983, when the corresponding figure was 42·8 per cent.

GPs (Night Calls)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what proposals he has put *(a)* to general practitioners in Wales and *(b)* to family health services authorities in Wales to help reduce the problem of night-time calls;

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure that any measures aimed at curbing the increase in night-time calls to general practitioners in Wales do not discourage those who are in genuine need of advice or help.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: One of the basic aims of the new contract for GPs is to make it more responsive to patient needs and demands. Requests for night visits reflect patient demand and the Government will not do anything that might prejudice the proper provision of general medical services in cases of genuine need. The decision as to whether a night visit should be made in any particular case is and must be governed by a GP's clinical judgment.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to exclude charges from any steps aimed at reducing night-time calls on general practitioners in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There are no proposals and never have been to charge patients for night-time calls. The article which appeared in the *Wales on Sunday* newspaper was based on a misunderstanding. The £45 referred to in the article is the fee paid by the FHSA to the GP for visiting a patient on his list. The hon. Gentleman's comments in the report alleging that it was part of a government plan to privatise the NHS are revealed for the nonsense they are. I advise the hon. Gentleman to check his facts before making baseless statements which could mislead and cause needless worry.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the location, including the county, of the incinerators which dispose of BSE-infected cattle that are currently operating in Wales and in each case give the potential capacity and actual capacity for throughput each week of infected cattle; whether he has plans to introduce new incinerators; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: At present there are two incinerators in Wales used for this purpose, located in Dyfed and Clwyd. These together with incinerators located in England currently provide enough capacity to incinerate all suspect BSE carcases. I expect that these facilities will continue to prove sufficient to incinerate all such carcases from Wales.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the confirmed cases of BSE in Wales *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* before 1991 on a county basis.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of cases of confirmed BSE in Wales on a county basis *(a)* in 1991 *(b)* before 1991 is as follows:

County	*1991*	*Before 1991*
Clwyd	288	287
Dyfed	1,019	1,015
Gwent	123	186
Gwynedd	63	73
Mid Glamorgan	35	60
Powys	191	232
South Glamorgan	44	66
West Glamorgan	6	13

Redundancies

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will introduce specific measures to alleviate the effects of redundancy upon the workers recently declared redundant by Denis Ferranti Meters at its factory in Gwynedd; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: In July of last year we announced a substantial package of measures to help unemployed people back into work. This includes expert advice, help in looking for a job, extra training and a new work experience programme through employment action. This new package, together with other measures already in place, amounts to the most comprehensive set of programmes we have ever had to alleviate unemployment and help those who have lost their jobs.

In addition my Department, the Welsh Development Agency and other Government agencies also operate a wide range of other measures aimed at combating unemployment. The Welsh Office and all the other bodies will continue to look for, and respond swiftly to, development opportunities that arise which have the potential to reduce unemployment.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the figures for male unemployment in Newport, Gwent and Wales at the latest available date.

Mr. David Hunt: In December 1991, there were 5,466, 15,155 and 97,065 unemployed male claimants in the Newport district, Gwent and Wales respectively.

Neighbourhood Hospital, South Glamorgan

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *509*, what additional information his Department sought from the South Glamorgan health authority on 23 December regarding its application for approval in principle for the construction of the new neighbourhood hospital on the site of the former St. David's hospital; when the original application for approval was made; and how many other requests his Department has made before 23 December for additional information.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 16 January 1992. Our Department required South Glamorgan health authority to comply with the mandatory Capricode health building procedures following earlier guidance given to the authority in July 1991.

Quangos

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new quangos he plans to establish during 1992.

Mr. David Hunt: In 1992 my present plans include the establishment of the Wales Youth Agency and, subject to the Further and Higher Education Bill receiving Royal Assent, the Further and higher education funding councils for Wales.

Heart Operations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *507*, what other initiatives have been undertaken since the target for heart operations per annum was set; and in what ways the option appraisal on how to make good the balance of the target will differ from the other initiatives.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In addition to the developments outlined in my answer to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 13 January 1992, we have already invested in excess of £7 million capital and over £5 million revenue to improve cardiac facilities, including vital support services, at the University Hospital of Wales (UHW) in order to increase capacity to 600 adults and 100 paediatric open heart operations per annum, with cardiology at an appropriate level.

Since 1989-90, a further £1·1 million has been made available to South Glamorgan health authority to contract, on behalf of all south Wales DHAs, for additional adult cardiac surgery at other specialist centres following assessment of patients at UHW. An additional £0·5 million has enabled UHW to undertake an increased number of angioplasty and valvuloplasty procedures on Welsh patients.

Clwyd health authority, which secures its cardiac services from specialist centres in England, has also received additional central funding, on a recurrent basis to increase provision for its patients.

Pending the establishment of the paediatric cardiac unit at UHW, as an interim measure, services have been procured from the specialist children's hospital in Bristol for which nearly £400,000 additional funding has been provided.

The option appraisal will establish the alternatives available for meeting the balance of 400 adult operations in the light of the latest estimate of need, capacity created by the development programme already announced, medical and technological advance and the opportunities available.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to set out the progress being made in the Welsh NHS in this speciality.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *508*, whether the attempt to recover the improperly paid sum to the past chief executive of the

Development Board for Rural Wales, was directed at *(a)* Dr. Skewis alone, *(b)* the chairman of the board alone or *(c)* both, indicating in which order.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that recovery has been sought from Dr. Skewis, who has declined a request from the Development Board for Rural Wales for re-payment of the sum paid in respect of untaken leave.

Hospital Provision

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *510*, what involvement the NHS directorate in Wales had in the decision to set up the review of hospital provision in South and Mid Glamorgan.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Directorate officials discussed the proposal with those concerned, but the decision to proceed and on what basis was made by the health authorities and the College of Medicine alone.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress he has made in fulfilling the undertaking in respect of the possible effects of groundwater given in 1990 to the House of Commons Select Committee which examined the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

Mr. David Hunt: The Select Committee which considered the private Bill requested in May 1990 that a further year's work on groundwater modelling be undertaken by Hydrotechnica. It required a three-month consultation exercise to be carried out, following which I would make my decision. The Committee specified that I should allow public funds to be put towards the construction of the barrage only if I was satisfied that all the relevant economic, technical and safety criteria could be met. When the private Bill fell in April 1991, I announced that I would none the less continue to honour the commitment to that Committee.

The further year's work ended in August 1991, and the consultation period began on 25 September that year. Copies of the report, together with the response of Cardiff Bay development corporation, were laid before the House. The start of consultation was announced by means of a public notice in the press and received widespread media coverage. People and organisations who had taken a particular interest in the subject were also notified individually. The consultation period ended on 31 December, but I have also taken account of the few representations which came in after this date.

In view of the complexities of the issues concerned, I commissioned Mr. Roy Stoner, director of the Institute of Irrigation Studies at the university of Southampton, to act as my independent expert adviser. A copy of his advice is attached to this letter. Mr. Stoner has read the Hydrotechnica report, the development corporations's response and all of the submissions received as part of the consultation exercise.

I received some 140 responses to the consultation exercise, of which 89 were "pro-forma" letters expressing general concerns about groundwater, with particular reference to the writers' houses. A large number of the other representations also expressed fairly general concerns about groundwater and the protected property line. A small number of submissions discussed the issues in depth, and these were analysed individually in Mr. Stoner's report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. I have considered most carefully all the evidence in the report from Hydrotechnica, the development corporation's response and representations during the three-month consultation period.

Taking each of the criteria set by the Select Committee in turn, I shall deal first with safety. Having considered all of the evidence, I have no reason to think that the predicted groundwater levels, even in what Hydrotechnica predict to be the "extreme case", will present any risk to safety when considered together with the proposed remedial measures.

Some respondents referred to the separate issue of river flooding in their submissions. I note in this context that the National Rivers Authority, the body with statutory responsibility, has commented:

"during events equivalent to design events for the flood defences, the barrage will not reduce the levels of protection provided and may create a worthwhile improvement".

On the technical criterion, I am satisfied that the remedial measures for buildings envisaged by the development corporation, together with the additional drainage recommended for certain sensitive areas, are technically feasible. However, I noted with interest the suggestion by Mr. Stoner that the possibility of de-watering wells should be investigated. In view of the prospect of reducing the disruption to householders, I have asked the corporation to commission a study of this proposal. I am also grateful to Mr. Stoner for his suggestion that the protected property line should be extended in two areas. I am disposed to accept his recommendation.

Finally, on the economic criterion, I note that the costs of remedial works should the "extreme case" materialise would be some £9 million greater than the costs for the "most likely" case included in the financial memorandum. I have therefore re-considered the economic appraisal on the basis of the "extreme case" figures. The result shows only a marginal reduction of the return on the barrage. I also note that de-watering wells, if practicable, could considerably reduce costs, but I have not relied on this in making my decision.

I am therefore satisfied that all of the criteria relating to groundwater—safety, technical and economic—can be met. Subject, therefore, to parliamentary approval for the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill, I propose to make public funding available for the construction of the barrage.

Local Authorities (Capital Spending)

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are local authority capital expenditure allocations for 1991-92 and for 1992-93 for each local authority in Wales; and what is the percentage increase (i) in cash terms and (ii) in real terms.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett *[holding reply 17 January]:* Local authorities no longer receive capital allocations. Since 1990-91 these have been replaced by credit approvals. Basic credit approvals for 1991-92 and 1992-93 for individual authorities are shown in the following table. These are unhypothecated to individual services. In addition, local authorities also receive direct capital grant and supplementary credit approvals for specific schemes/services such as projects of national importance, road

schemes, urban programme and housing grants. In total for Wales these are £262 million for 1991-92 and £320 million for 1992-93.

Basic credit approvals

	1991-92[1]	*1992-93*[2]	*Per cent. increase in cash terms*	*Per cent. increase in real terms*[3]
	£000	*£000*		
Alyn and Deeside	1,692	2,559	51	45
Colwyn	1,673	1,765	5	1
Delyn	1,712	2,018	18	13
Glyndwr	1,264	1,435	14	9
Rhuddlan	1,722	1,918	11	7
Wrexham Maelor	5,653	5,910	5	0
Carmarthen	1,572	1,890	20	15
Ceredigion	1,715	2,135	24	19
Dinefwr	1,246	1,472	18	13
Llanelli	4,097	4,152	1	−3
Preseli Pembroke	2,120	3,236	53	46
South Pembroke	1,387	1,627	17	12
Blaenau Gwent	3,825	4,232	11	6
Islwyn	1,480	2,328	57	51
Monmouth	2,298	2,788	21	16
Newport	3,061	3,840	25	20
Torfaen	3,188	4,172	31	25
Aberconwy	1,667	2,131	28	22
Arfon	2,588	2,841	10	5
Dwyfor	1,390	1,440	4	−1
Meirionnydd	1,114	1,159	4	0
Ynys Mon	2,115	2,646	25	20
Cynon Valley	2,809	3,446	23	17
Merthyr Tydfil	2,102	2,658	26	21
Ogwr	3,996	3,690	−8	−12
Rhondda	2,978	3,566	20	15
Rhymney Valley	4,405	4,752	8	3
Taff Ely	2,844	1,860	−35	−37
Brecknock	1,213	1,506	24	19
Montgomeryshire	1,583	1,883	19	14
Radnorshire	558	728	30	25
Cardiff	6,532	13,908	113	104
Vale of Glamorgan	2,926	3,946	35	29
Port Talbot	2,784	3,158	13	9
Lliw Valley	2,471	2,717	10	5
Neath	2,160	2,792	29	24
Swansea	6,892	8,631	25	20
Clwyd	12,983	12,063	−7	−11
Dyfed	13,017	13,204	1	−3
Gwent	13,846	14,441	4	0
Gwynedd	8,626	8,592	0	−5
Mid Glamorgan	18,787	19,086	2	−3
Powys	6,550	6,727	3	−2
South Glamorgan	12,598	12,579	0	−4
West Glamorgan	11,906	12,357	4	−1
Total Districts	94,835	116,935	23	18
Total Counties	98,314	99,050	1	−4
Total Wales	193,149	215,985	12	7

[1] Excludes discretionary renovation grants, which for 1991-92 were issued as supplementary credit approvals.
[2] Includes discretionary renovation grants.
[3] Using assumed increase in gdp deflator of 4·5 per cent.

Plant Breeding Station

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he is satisfied with the experimental work carried out at the Welsh plant breeding station at Gogerddan, Cardiganshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The Welsh plant breeding station (WPBS) at Gogerddan is a constituent part of the AFRC Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER) which has other sites at Hurley in Berkshire (due for closure in 1992) and at North Wyke in Devon. The AFRC is an independent body and is responsible for approving programmes of work carried out at its institutes.

I understand that AFRC is just completing a major £5·75 million redevelopment of the Gogerddan site to improve research facilities and house staff relocated from Hurley, and is taking over the Trawsgoed experimental husbandry farm from MAFF as a research farm. This will enable the institute to pursue a basic and strategic research programme approved by AFRC aimed at developing environmentally sensitive grassland-based animal agriculture.

HEALTH

Clinical Trials

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to require ethics committees to maintain long-term storage of the records of people involved in scientific clinical trials to enable long-term follow up to be carried out if it later emerges that this should be done to check for an unexpected long-term, or slow to develop, after-effect.

Mr. Dorrell: Research ethics committees have no powers to gain access to or require the long-term storage of the records of people involved in scientific clinical trials. Hospitals are currently required to keep the medical records of all patients, including those involved in trials, for a minimum of eight years after the end of treatment. In addition, a recent EC directive (91/507/EC, adopted on 19 July 1991 and shortly to be implemented in the UK) requires the person responsible for marketing a medicinal product to keep codes, identifying patients involved in the trial, for a minimum of 15 years. This additional requirement should further facilitate the identification of clinical trial subjects.

Causes of Death

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing the causes of death of men aged over 65 years and women over 60 years in each month from January 1988 to the latest convenient date, identifying separately the numbers who died from hypothermia.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not readily available in the form requested. Annual figures showing deaths by cause are published in "Mortality Statistics: Cause", Series DH2, copies of which are available in the Library.

The table shows deaths registered in each month from January 1988 to September 1991, for men aged 65 and over, and women aged 60 and over. It includes deaths from all causes and from hypothermia. It also shows deaths where hypothermia was mentioned on the death certificate.

Number of deaths from all causes, and for hypothermia as a mention on the death certificate, and also as an underlying cause of death[1] by age, sex, and month of registration, 1988 to 1991

Month of registration	All causes		Hypothermia mentions		Hypothermia underlying cause of death[1]	
	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over
1988						
January	18,946	23,745	9	37	2	14
February	19,376	23,967	24	44	8	20
March	20,470	26,370	24	29	14	17
April	16,923	21,541	7	16	3	6
May	16,185	20,047	14	16	6	7
June	16,712	20,888	4	13	4	5
July	15,093	18,536	4	3	3	0
August	16,528	20,615	4	4	2	1
September	16,001	19,457	5	10	1	5
October	16,790	20,630	3	11	0	3
November	17,844	22,256	14	20	5	6
December	19,256	24,699	15	30	6	15

Month of registration	All causes		Hypothermia mentions		Hypothermia underlying cause of death[1]	
	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over
1989						
January	20,202	25,839	17	32	7	13
February	16,734	20,623	9	27	4	11
March	18,453	22,991	11	31	8	14
April	16,324	20,258	11	28	4	14
May	17,556	21,649	7	22	4	15
June	16,708	20,767	2	8	0	4
July	15,515	19,667	2	5	1	2
August	15,289	19,262	1	1	0	1
September	15,198	18,703	3	4	2	1
October	17,290	21,679	2	11	0	1
November	17,944	22,341	12	12	7	3
December	25,874	34,668	20	36	12	18

Month of registration	All causes		Hypothermia mentions		Hypothermia underlying cause of death[1]	
	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over
1990						
January	23,017	30,237	20	35	10	14
February	17,362	21,462	20	23	10	9
March	17,757	21,596	15	28	9	13
April	17,311	21,777	11	15	2	6
May	17,187	21,021	8	17	5	9
June	15,881	19,664	2	13	2	6
July	16,573	20,582	1	6	0	3
August	15,575	19,657	2	3	0	1
September	14,481	17,568	2	5	0	3
October	17,959	22,050	5	8	3	1
November	17,435	21,244	10	21	7	6
December	19,622	24,220	15	36	3	9

Month of registration	All causes		Hypothermia mentions		Hypothermia underlying cause of death[1]	
	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over	Males 65 and over	Females 60 and over
1991[2]						
January	22,016	28,486	22	58	10	24
February	20,049	25,641	45	75	27	30
March	17,204	21,626	17	34	11	19
April	18,499	23,212	14	23	8	10
May	17,137	21,469	8	22	5	11
June	15,337	19,103	2	18	2	6
July	16,639	21,013	3	12	0	8
August	14,793	18,588	0	5	0	2
September	15,272	18,799	1	5	2	2
October	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
November	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
December	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] Assigned to 9th revision International Classification of diseases codes 778·3 and 991·6.
[2] 1991 figures are provisional.

NHS (Awards)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds he introduced an age limit on the payment of distinction and meritorious service awards to doctors and dentists within the national health service; and if he will now reconsider his decision.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Awards made close to retirement age are not in the best interests of the service.

Trust Funds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether health authorities, health trust executives and non-executive directors are required to comply with the Charities Acts and the Trustees Investment Acts when dealing with matters involving the authorities' charitable trust funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: When undertaking their duties in respect of charitable trust funds held by the NHS, health service trustees need to comply with all appropriate legislation, including the Acts mentioned.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the increase in expenditure on computer hardware and software, management salaries and other costs in respect of each first wave trust hospital and its respective hospital authority in the year before trust status and the projected increase in these costs in the first year of operation of the hospital trust, showing the information by regional and district health authority and trust hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* the Bradford hospitals NHS trust and *(b)* the Doncaster royal infirmary and Montagu NHS trust (i) the number of business plans published and (ii) to whom they were distributed and circulated.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has not published any trust business plans for 1991-92. Trusts are free to decide for themselves whether to publish their plans. No central record is kept of whether they do. The Government have made it clear that trust business plans for 1992-93 and subsequent years will be published. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. R. Walker the chairman of the Bradford hospital NHS trust and Mr. C. Bryant the chairman of the Doncaster royal Infirmary and Montagu NHS trust, for details.

Care Homes, Manchester

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of private care or nursing homes in the Greater Manchester area who have had their registration cancelled under the Registered Homes Act 1984 during 1990 and 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have been notified of one cancellation of registration for a residential care home.

Mortality Statistics, Manchester

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the rates of perinatal mortality and infant mortality in the area health authorities in the Greater Manchester area in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is shown in the table. The perinatal and infant mortality rate for 1991 is not yet available.

Perinatal mortality rate and infant mortality rate for the district health authorities within the North Western regional health authority, 1989 and 1990

Area	*Year*	*Perinatal mortality rate*	*Infant mortality rate*
North Western regional health authority	1989	9·2	9·1
	1990	8·9	8·5
Lancaster district health authority	1989	[1]8·3	[1]7·7
	1990	[1]7·7	[1]11·0
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde district health authority	1989	7·4	8·5
	1990	8·3	9·1
Preston district health authority	1989	[1]8·9	[1]8·0
	1990	[1]3·3	[1]7·0
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley district health authority	1989	8·4	8·4
	1990	7·9	9·6
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale district health authority	1989	10·1	11·8
	1990	15·3	12·4
West Lancashire district health authority	1989	13·9	[1]9·1
	1990	[1]8·7	[1]9·4
Chorley and South Ribble district health authority	1989	[1]6·3	11·2
	1990	[1]5·2	[1]4·2
Bolton district health authority	1989	9·2	9·5
	1990	8·5	7·0
Bury district health authority	1989	11·0	10·7
	1990	10·4	7·7
North Manchester health authority	1989	11·1	10·7
	1990	12·0	8·5
Central Manchester health authority	1989	11·8	12·9
	1990	[1]8·8	[1]8·9
South Manchester health authority	1989	11·5	11·2
	1990	[1]6·6	9·2
Oldham district health authority	1989	7·4	8·3
	1990	12·7	11·4
Rochdale district health authority	1989	10·1	10·1
	1990	8·4	9·3
Salford district health authority	1989	10·7	8·1
	1990	9·6	7·1
Stockport district health authority	1989	8·4	6·3
	1990	8·8	8·8
Tameside and Glossop district health authority	1989	9·0	7·5
	1990	7·1	7·6
Trafford district health authority	1989	7·5	9·3
	1990	8·3	7·0

Area	Year	Perinatal mortality rate	Infant mortality rate
Wigan district health authority	1989	7·7	6·8
	1990	8·7	7·4

[1] Rate calculated from less than 20 events.
Perinatal rate: stillbirths and deaths under 1 week per 1,000 total live and stillbirths.
Infant rate: deaths under 1 year per 1,000 livebirths.
Source: OPCS vital statistics 1989/1990.

Disabled People (Footwear)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revise MHM50 dealing with footwear for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The revision of the MHM50 booklet is in the work programme for 1992.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of electors in the 1992 provisional electoral register for each district and parliamentary constituency in England and Wales and the equivalent numbers on the 1991 register.

Mr. Dorrell: Numbers of people on draft electoral registers in England and Wales are not available centrally. The Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys sent out RPF29 inquiry forms asking local electoral registration officers (EROs) for information about the new 1992 registers on 16 January. EROs have been asked to make returns by 16 February—the date on which these registers come into use.

In Vitro Fertilisation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement concerning the level of charges for licences to practice to be levied by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority on small clinics which currently offer in vitro fertilisation to couples; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 17 July 1991 at column *194*.

The fee structure is designed so that fees are based on the amount of treatment activity at a treatment centre. Smaller centres pay less than larger ones.

South Derbyshire

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those capital schemes in southern Derbyshire district which have involved sums of over £1 million since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is as follows:

Scheme	Completion date	Cost £ million[1]
Derby city hospital phase 1	20 December 1985	3·6
Derby royal infirmary phase 2	2 October 1985	3·7
Derby royal infirmary (kitchen and dining)	29 June 1987	3·34
Ilkeston community hospital	16 April 1987	3·8

[1] Capital works only; approved tender sum plus direct contracts (fees and equipment not included).

Radiation

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims against Exeter health authority relating to excessive doses of radiation have been made; how many have been settled; how many are outstanding; when he expects these to be settled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A total of 106 claims have been made to date. Of these 79 have been settled, a further six are under negotiation and 21 remain outstanding. The 21 outstanding represent claims which have been notified but where medical evidence indicates there may be no basis for any payment or where the claim is not currently being pursued. The health authority sends regular quarterly reports to all local hon. Members on this matter. The most recent report was issued on 16 January.

Electors

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the total number of electors registered in each parliamentary constituency in England for 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991 showing an aggregate for the country for each of those years; and if he will list the percentage changes that have taken place in each case compared with the previous year's figures.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Asthmatics

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding free prescriptions for asthmatics.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: During the last 12 months, 36 letters from hon. Members and 15 letters from members of the public have been received.

Child Health

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about progress towards implementing the proposals of the committee on child health services in 1976 (Cmnd. 6684).

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We continue to subscribe to the general principles of the Court report, particularly the emphasis it gave to the integration of child health services. This was a central theme of our guide on the welfare of children and young people in hospital, which will be developed further in the complementary guidance that we plan to issue on community child health services.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the effect of the internal market on cross-boundary flows for paediatric cases.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Contractual arrangements introduced by health authorities for children's services provide for the great majority of referrals. There have been few difficulties in arranging extra-contractual referrals.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider making immunisation against certain diseases a precondition of children attending school.

Mr. Dorrell: No. We recommend that all children should be immunised against diphtheria, tetanus, polio and whooping cough by three doses of vaccine at age two, three and four months, and against measles, mumps and rubella by one dose at age 12 to 15 months. It is essential that these immunisations are completed at an early age to achieve the most effective levels of protection for the community. Under the present system that objective is being achieved. The latest estimates available show the following rates of immunisation nationally:

Diphtheria, tetanus, polio—92 per cent. by 12 months of age
Whooping cough—88 per cent by 12 months of age
Measles, mumps, rubella—90 per cent. by 24 months of age

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for each district health authority, how many extra-contractual referrals for paediatric cases have been *(a)* made, *(b)* funded and *(c)* not been funded since the introduction of the internal market in April 1991;

(2) how many district health authorities have negotiated contracts for paediatric care outside their authority boundaries; and if he will list them.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct all district health authorities to report annually on arrangements for child health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We monitor the quality of child health services—in the same way as other health services—through a continuous review of NHS authority preformance. In addition, the patients charter introduces a new right to information which will ensure health authorities and hospitals make available much more information about local services and performance, including child health services.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of Government circular, "The welfare of children and young people in hospital" HSG(91)1.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The guide has been very well received both within the national health service and among voluntary organisations and special interest groups concerned with the welfare of children. Last autumn the Royal College of Nursing held four regional conferences on implementation of the guidance in which the Department participated. It is already in general use as a reference document in the negotiation and agreement of contracts for child health services.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that parents throughout the United Kingdom possess a standardised health record for each of their children; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have supported the introduction nationally of a model parent-held child health record produced by a working party led by the British Paediatric Association. The Department will shortly be writing to all health authorities, family health services authorities and NHS trusts in England, commending the use of these records. We shall also be issuing guidance on how copies of the record can be obtained, together with notes on implementation.

The introduction of parent-held records in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make it his policy to introduce free prescriptions for asthmatics;

(2) if he will undertake to examine the feasibility of phasing out prescription charges on drugs used for potentially life-threatening complaints.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to extend the range of conditions which currently attract free prescriptions on medical grounds. There are already wide-ranging exemption arrangements, underpinned by the separate scheme for remission on the grounds of low income, which ensure that no one need be deterred from obtaining any necessary medication on financial grounds. Nearly 80 per cent. of NHS prescriptions items are currently dispensed free of charge.

Children's Needs

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities have set up liaison committees to consider the multiple needs of children across health, education and social services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Mental Illness

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of mental illness admissions in each half-yearly period from 1987 to the most recent both nationally and in each standard health region; and in each case what is the proportion of total admissions the figure represents.

Mr. Dorrell: Figures for admissions on a half yearly basis are not readily available. Final figures are not yet available but the table provides provisional estimates for admissions to NHS hospitals and hospital units in England for each financial year 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Admissions (ordinary + day case) to NHS hospitals and hospital units in England by medical specialty of consultant

Health authority	1987-88			1988-89			1989-90		
	M.I.	All	Per cent.	M.I.	All	Per cent.	M.I.	All	Per cent.
Northern RHA	20,800	546,950	3·8	15,250	586,150	2·6	14,650	601,000	2·4
Yorkshire RHA	16,850	655,600	2·6	16,650	685,150	2·4	17,350	703,000	2·5
Trent RHA	14,100	708,150	2·0	13,650	752,800	1·8	14,650	777,550	1·9
East Anglia RHA	6,900	320,450	2·2	6,950	333,450	2·1	7,600	354,850	2·1
North West Thames RHA	13,200	514,850	2·6	14,600	531,250	2·7	14,000	550,850	2·5
North East Thames RHA	11,750	654,650	1·8	14,750	648,250	2·3	16,800	689,500	2·4
South East Thames RHA	13,650	540,250	2·5	13,000	614,900	2·1	14,900	625,050	2·4
South West Thames RHA	9,400	413,250	2·3	10,750	439,600	2·4	11,850	451,950	2·6
Wessex RHA	9,450	419,850	2·3	11,850	491,100	2·4	12,800	590,650	2·5
Oxford RHA	8,150	339,250	2·4	7,550	372,450	2·0	8,050	387,850	2·1
South Western RHA	15,900	537,500	3·0	17,350	577,150	3·0	17,350	592,600	2·9
West Midlands RHA	18,300	898,900	2·0	17,950	887,900	2·0	18,100	922,400	2·0
Mersey RHA	10,500	454,350	2·3	10,150	453,200	2·2	10,050	476,250	2·1
North Western RHA	17,600	829,350	2·1	17,700	841,050	2·1	18,750	865,450	2·2
Special HAs	1,950	92,500	2·1	1,800	111,100	1·6	1,650	114,100	1·4
	188,500	7,925,650	2·4	189,950	8,325,500	2·3	198,550	8,622,050	2·3

Source: SMI2C—HES.A6A

Meningitis

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list notified cases of meningitis in Derbyshire for each of the past 10 years for which figures are available, together with details of notified cases over recent months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table:

Year	Number of cases	
	All meningitis	Meningococcal Meningitis
1981	11	4
1982	15	2
1983	34	22
1984	16	5
1985	22	13
1986	42	22
1987	40	17
1988	35	11
1989	40	19
1990	41	23
1991	48	21

Project 2000

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the allocation of college places on Project 2000 courses to enrolled nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) referred to such a case in the House on 13 January at column *717*, and I am inquiring into it. No other representations have been received. Project 2000 courses are designed for new entrants to nursing, not for people who already hold a nursing qualification.

Psychiatric Prisons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has currently under consideration any plans to discharge any prisoner in a long-stay psychiatric prison into the care of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne social services department.

Mr. Dorrell: We are not aware of any such plans.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled Employees (Dismissals)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many registered disabled people have complained of dismissal contrary to section 9(5) of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 since 1981; how many of these cases were referred to the committees for the employment of people with disabilities; how many of these cases were then referred by those committees to him with a recommendation for action; and of these referrals, in how many cases was action taken by him.

Mr. Jackson: The employment service's local disablement resettlement officers (DROs) receive a small number of complaints each year from registered disabled people who think that their dismissal may have been contrary to section 9(5) of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944. However, the precise number of complaints made since 1981 is not known. All complaints are investigated by my officials.

On three occasions since 1981 dismissals of registered disabled people, by employers not employing the 3 per cent. quota of registered disabled people, have been referred to the local committee for the employment of people with disabilities for a report.

The 1944 Act does not require the committees to make recommendations in their reports to Ministers. Their reports are made in confidence for the use by Ministers in coming to a decision on appropriate action in each case.

There have been no prosecutions of employers in this period.

Health and Safety Executive Offshore Division

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspector grade staff have transferred into the Health and Safety Executive offshore division since 1 April 1991 from *(a)* other parts of the Health and Safety Executive, *(b)* the Department of Energy and *(c)* the Department of Transport; and in each case, how many were initially engaged in (i) policy and (ii) operational work.

Mr. Forth: The number of inspector grade staff who have transferred into the offshore safety division of the Health and Safety Executive on or after 1 April 1991 is as follows:

Department	Number	Of whom policy	Of whom operational	Personnel and training
Department of Energy	[1]39	nil	38	1
Department of Transport	nil	nil	nil	nil
Other parts of Health and Safety Executive	25	3	21	1

[1] One inspector has since retired.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applicants for inspector grade posts in the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division have been offered employment since 1 April 1991; and how many of these *(a)* are now in post and *(b)* have refused employment.

Mr. Forth: Since 1 April 1991, 39 applicants have had formal offers of appointment and 19 of them are now in post. A further 16 applicants are either negotiating a suitable starting date or are to respond to offers of employment. Four applicants have refused offers of employment.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspector grade posts in the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division remain unfilled; and what is the planned time scale for these posts to be filled.

Mr. Forth: It is the intention of the Health and Safety Executive to increase the number of inspector grade posts to 122 by 1 April 1992. On 15 January 1992 there were 82 staff already in post, and 40 unfilled posts. There are, in addition, six successful candidates from the first two recruitment campaigns due to join in the next month or so and 37 who are still being processed. While they may not all be in post by 1 April 1992, the target should be achieved shortly afterwards.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many inspector grade posts are planned for the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division for the years ending 31 March 1992, 1993 and 1994; and how many were planned for the year ended 31 March 1991.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division currently plans to have 122 inspector grade posts by 1 April 1992.

Further expansion by about 50 posts is currently being planned for 1 April 1993, details of which will be contained in the Health and Safety Commission's plan of work for 1992-93, due to be published in the spring. At present, the increase anticipated for 1 April 1994 will take the numbers to around 200 inspectors.

Planning for the year ending 31 March 1991 was the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. There were, however, 39 inspector posts in the Department of Energy's petroleum engineering division when it was transferred to the Health and Safety Executive.

Training Credits

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out, by the relevant training and enterprise council, the overall number of training credits available, and the take-up at the latest available date.

Mr. Jackson: As at 8 December 1991, 31,506 training credits has been issued within the 11 pilot schemes; 15,672 of these have already been used by young people to obtain high quality training of their choice. This number continues to rise.

The table shows the figures set out by pilot areas:

Starts—at 8 December 1991

TEC/lec	Credits issued	Starts
Birmingham	3,387	2,565
Bradford	3,159	2,105
Devon and Cornwall	7,193	4,579
Grampian	5,168	[1]941
Hertfordshire	3,086	672
Kent	541	172
North East Wales	463	226
Northumberland	1,189	1,292
South and East Cheshire	4,134	981
SOLOTEC	795	650
Suffolk	2,391	1,489
Total	31,506	15,672

[1] These figures represent credits issued and starts at 30 November 1991. This is due to different accounting periods for Scottish Enterprise.

National Vocational Qualifications

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department has made any evaluation of the method of assessment used in the national vocational qualification system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Since 1986, the Employment Department has been continually developing and evaluating methods of assessment for NVQs. Key areas investigated have been performance in the work place, skills/proficiency testing, assessment of knowledge and understanding, and accreditation of prior learning.

Radiological Emergencies

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) 27 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *557-58*, he will set out the reasons why EC directive 89/618/EURATOM was not transposed into United Kingdom law by the required date of 28 November 1991.

Mr. Forth: The implementation period of two years is shorter than that for other Euratom directives. Implementation was not assisted by the publication of guidance for member states on implementing the principal articles of the directive only eight months before the implementation date.

I am advised from the European Commission that the UK are not alone in the late implementation of this directive. Nevertheless, progress on implementation continues. The Health and Safety Commission has published for consultation draft proposals to implement the directive. Regulations will be made as soon as

comments have been considered and the proposals have been scrutinised by the European Commission. Article 30 of the Euratom treaty requires a three-month consultation period to allow the European Commission time to comment on the UK's finalised implementation proposals.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has for the implementation of European Council directive 89/618/EURATOM in relation to informing the general public about health protection measures to be applied, and safety steps to be taken, in the event of a radiological emergency.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer given in reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 13 January 1992, at column *457*.

Wakefield TEC

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the current membership of the board of Wakefield training and enterprise council meets the criteria set out in the original TEC prospectus.

Mr. Jackson: Yes, Sir.

Jobcentres

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of jobcentres in England and Wales for each year since 1980.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Labour Statistics

Sir Peter Blaker: to ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimate of the number of people in work, whether employed or self-employed, in Blackpool in *(a)* November 1981 and *(b)* November 1991.

Mr. Forth: Information available for employees in employment is from the censuses of employment for September 1981 and September 1989. The estimated numbers of employees employed in the Blackpool travel-to-work area at the two census dates were 102,300 and 105,200, respectively.

The available estimates for the number of self-employed in local areas are from the census of population for April 1981 when there were 18,200 in Blackpool.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received supporting the introduction of cold weather credits.

Mr. Scott: We have received several representations from different sources concerning the introduction of cold weather credits, and I have written directly to the convener of the Campaign for Cold Weather Credits setting out the Government's position.

The Government has recently introduced substantial improvements to the cold weather payments scheme: from this winter, payments are being made automatically to those who are entitled; a forecast trigger has been introduced; and the capital limit has been abolished bringing a further 400,000 people into the scheme. We will continue to keep the scheme under review.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of making one week's cold weather payment, assuming 100 per cent. take-up on a nationwide temperature trigger.

Mr. Scott: The estimated cost would be £13·5 million.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total cost in each of the last five winters of making cold weather payments.

Mr. Scott: The total costs are set out in the table. The administrative costs are not available for winters before 1989-90.

Year	*Payment costs £ million*	*Administrative costs £ million*
1990-91	8·6	3·6
1989-90	0·4	0·1
1988-89	0·0025	Not available
1987-88	0·5	Not available
1986-87	10·2	Not available

From this winter payments are now made automatically by computer rather than clerically at correspondingly reduced costs.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make ex-gratia payments to those entitled to cold weather payments in Halifax who would have qualified had the readings been taken at Peckett Well instead of Bingley for the period 7 to 13 December;

(2) what are the figures for the period 7 to 13 December at the weather stations at Bingley and Peckett Well;

(3) why it was decided to take readings at the national weather stations at Bingley near Calderdale instead of from the one in Calderdale.

Mr. Scott: Ex-gratia payments are not appropriate in these circumstances because there have been no failures or delays by officials. The Meteorological Office uses the weather station at Wilsden to provide the Benefits Agency with the temperature information for the Halifax area that is used to trigger cold weather payments. It advises us that Wilsden is climatologically representative for the Halifax area, and we have no plans to change this weather station link. The Meteorological Office confirms that the weather stations used for the scheme must be equipped to provide the information in the form and speed needed; those at Bingley and Peckett Well are not so equipped.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in Halifax would be entitled to the cold weather payment if it had been awarded for the recent seven-day period.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the dates of the periods during

which the cold weather payments were triggered since the scheme began in his Department's cold weather scheme areas served by the metering stations at *(a)* Boulmer and *(b)* Eskdalemuir.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate how many additional payments of cold weather payments would have been paid in the Borders region during the recent period earlier this winter when the scheme was triggered by temperatures at Eskdalemuir if the previous system of temperature monitoring had been retained.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Hours of Work

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many income support claimants in 1988 received transitional protection as a result of the re-definition of full-time work in April 1988 from 30 hours to 24; and how many continued to receive this in subsequent years to 1991.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table:

Date	*Number receiving protection*
April 1988	155
April 1989	51
April 1990	17
April 1991	3

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to disseminate information to the public about the amended definition of full-time work to 16 hours for income support, family credit and housing benefit, respectively.

Mr. Jack: We are evaluating a wide range of media advertising options to provide a good general coverage about the effects on individuals of the "hours change". In addition we plan to write to all people who are receiving income support and working between 16 and 24 hours a week to explain how the new rules will affect them. The leaflets and claim forms for income support, family credit and housing benefit will be amended to reflect the change.

Income Support and Family Credit

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state *(a)* the total number of recipients of income support and total expenditure and *(b)* the total number of recipients of family credit and total expenditure for 1989 and at the latest date for which figures are available segregating these figures to show the number of (i) lone parents and (ii) their dependants, included in the total figures in each case.

Mr. Jack: Information is not available in precisely the form requested. The available information is given in the table.

	1989-90	*1990-91*
Income Support		
Numbers—		
total	4,155,000	4,165,000
lone parents	825,000	855,000
dependants of lone parents	1,419,000	1,496,000
	£ million	*£ million*
Expenditure—		
total	7,675	8,545
lone parents (and their dependants)	2,028	2,279
Family Credit		
Numbers—		
total	305,000	315,000
lone parents	118,000	123,000
dependants of lone parents	185,000	197,000
	£ million	*£ million*
Expenditure—		
total	425	484
lone parents (and their dependants)	176	188

Notes:

1. Numbers represent the estimated average numbers receiving benefits at any one time.
2. 1990-91 expenditure is estimated out-turn.
3. It is not possible to identify separately the expenditure attributable to dependants.

Concessionary Coal Payments

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of claimants in receipt of *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* community charge benefit who are having reductions made to their benefits on account of receipt of moneys in lieu of concessionary coal paid by National Coal.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost to the Exchequer of paying mortgage interest in full from the beginning of a claim for social security benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: Help with mortgage interest is given through income support. During the first 16 weeks of a claim from a person under age 60, half the eligible interest is included; the full interest may be included after this period, or from the outset where the claimant or his partner is aged 60 or over.

We estimate that the cost of paying mortgage interest in full from the beginning of the claim in all cases would be in the region of £75 million per year at 1991-92 prices.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1990 Annual Statistical Enquiry and the 1986/7/8 Family Expenditure Surveys.

Pension Age

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about his proposed consultation on equalisation of the state pension age.

Miss Widdecombe: On 18 December we published our discussion paper "Options for Equality in State Pension Age" (Cm 1723). The paper sets out relevant information to help inform public discussion on this important issue. Comments are welcome and should be received by the Department by 30 June 1992.

Pension Funds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will institute an inquiry into the position of pensioners of the Floform pension fund arising from employment at Floform, Welshpool, in the light of the Maxwell affair; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will introduce measures to ensure that pensioners receiving pensions arising from employment at Floform, Welshpool, are able to continue receiving their occupational pension entitlement during investigations into the whereabouts of pension moneys removed from the Maxwell pension funds; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Responsibility for protecting the interests of members of occupational pension schemes rests with the trustees of the scheme concerned. Current legislation provides that if a scheme that is used for contracting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme has insufficient funds to pay the premiums necessary to buy the members back into SERPS those premiums may be treated as paid and the members position in SERPS restored.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any proposals for reform of the statutory provisions relating to the control of pension funds; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 December at columns *374-75*.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will specify, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *512*, which of the new backup offices for the Child Support Agency will deal with payments and disbursements and its administration in Wales.

Mr. Jack: From April 1993 the Child Support Agency will tailor methods of payment and disbursement to suit the needs of each individual. These transactions can be made directly between individuals or via financial institutions. The Dudley Child Support Agency centre will for those maintenance applications originating in Wales, determine the levels payable upon receipt of the appropriate form by post or personal contact at local offices. The centre will also be responsible for recording information and if required administer payments and disbursements. From September 1993, when the Birkenhead centre becomes operational, such child maintenance cases for Wales, will be divided between it and the Dudley centre.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list how many Benefits Agency area offices are, in the last and the current financial year, restricting community care grants and other social fund assistance to *(a)* high-priority cases, *(b)* both low and high-priority areas and *(c)* have money left over after meeting all legitimate applications for such assistance.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income Support Statistics

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the numbers of claimants of income support in respect of mortgage interest both nationally and in each standard region, for 1989, 1990 and the most recent date in 1991 distinguishing between claimants who are *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* economically inactive, including pensioners or long-term sick and *(c)* claimants who are working less than 24 hours a week.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall let the hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible.

Council Tax

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what will be the effect of his proposed steepening of the taper to 20p in the pound for the proposed council tax on *(a)* the costs of council tax benefit to the Government and *(b)* the combined tax and benefit withdrawal rate on an additional £1 of income on a low-paid earner paying tax and national insurance, and claiming family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The higher taper needs to be considered in the context of the introduction of 100 per cent. maximum rebates from April 1993, and the decision not to adjust income-related benefit levels on the introduction of the council tax, despite the fact that people will no longer be expected to meet a minimum contribution of 20 per cent. of their community charge. The total cost of the amounts included in income-related benefit levels to help towards the 20 per cent. contribution is estimated to be £580 million in the current year and around £680 million in the next financial year. Retaining the same taper as in community charge benefit, 15 per cent., would have entailed expenditure, in current terms, some £60 million higher than the 20 per cent. taper proposed. Overall, benefit entitlement under the new tax will extend to claimants with broadly the same levels of income as those helped by community charge benefit.

The marginal deduction rate of a low-paid earner paying tax and national insurance contributions who is also in receipt of family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit will increase slightly from 96 per cent. to 97 per cent.

Source: Modelled using data drawn from the 1987 and 1988 Family Expenditure Surveys at 1991-92 prices and estimated council tax levels.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide whatever information is available to him regarding the numbers of persons, and as

a percentage of their populations, who have an income at or below *(a)* 60 per cent. and *(b)* 50 per cent. of average earnings in each EC country.

Mr. Jack: There are no comparable statistics available on average earnings in the member states of the European Community (EC). As a consequence, it is not possible to provide the information requested.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Criminal Legal Fees

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General if the Lord Chancellor will raise the level at which criminal legal fees are referred to the central taxation units from £4,000 to £8,000 for a trial period.

The Attorney-General: No. The central taxing teams were established only 10 months ago for the purpose of determining claims over £4,000. They are still settling into their role and it would be premature to consider changing it.

When a number of claims for less than £4,000 are linked to claims for between £4,000 and £8,000, circuit taxing directors have authority to release these claims to the court for determination and this is done wherever possible. This enables the teams to concentrate on those cases which properly require their expertise. The Lord Chancellor keeps the progress of the teams under close review.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General when he received an invitation from Hull city council for him to join them in an enforcement action against illegal Sunday trading; and what was his response.

The Attorney-General: The town clerk and chief executive of Hull city council wrote to me on 11 September 1991 and 29 November 1991 and invited me to co-operate with local authorities in enforcing the provisions of the Shops Act 1950. He was informed on both occasions that I did not consider that it was appropriate for me at present to intervene. I explained my views in the answer which I gave to the private notice question from my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) on 27 November 1991 at column 913.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements have been made to ensure that copies of the consolidated treaty of Rome, as amended at Maastricht, are available *(a)* to Members of Parliament and *(b)* to members of the general public; and when these arrangements will be put in place.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A total of 838 copies of the draft treaty on European union agreed at Maastricht were made available to Members of Parliament on 16 December 1991. The text is now being prepared for signature, provisionally scheduled for 7 February. The final text of the treaty will then be published as a Command Paper. Once this has been laid before the House, it will be available to the public through HMSO.

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to Saudi Arabia about financing the military training of young muslims in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since the US/Soviet agreement of last September to halt arms supplies to both sides in Afghanistan we have urged the Saudis, both bilaterally and with our EC partners, to provide only humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. The Saudi Government have told us that they fully support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to find a political solution to the conflict.

Immigration

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present number and current waiting time for interviews of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in (i) Bombay, (ii) New Delhi, (iii) Karachi and (iv) Islamabad, who are seeking entry visas to join either their wife or husband in the United Kingdom, as of 14 January.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As at 14 January, the numbers of husbands and wives waiting for a first interview for an entry clearance to join their spouses in the United Kingdom, together with the estimated waiting times in months, are:

	(a) Husbands	*((b) Wives*	*Waiting time*
(i) Bombay	73	238	3
(ii) New Delhi	80	158	3
(iii) Karachi	40	41	2
(iv) Islamabad	978	690	3

There is no difference in the waiting times for husbands and wives.

Libya

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the provisions of treaty and other international law underlying Her Majesty's Government's assessment that the Government of Libya is not a competent authority to investigate and try the two Libyan nationals named in the warrant issued by the Lord Advocate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It is not international law which has led us to the conclusion that it would be wholly inappropriate for Libya to try the accused. The reasons for our conclusion are contained in the written reply I gave the hon. Gentleman on 17 January 1991, at column *713*.

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will supply a copy of the prosecution evidence against the Libyan citizens alleged to be responsible for the murders at Lockerbie to the Libyan court inquiring into the case.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. As the Lord Advocate said in his statement on 14 November 1991, proceedings became active for the purpose of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 when the sheriff granted warrants for arrest and he could not therefore comment on the evidence on which the

charges are based. The statement made by the Lord Advocate contains details of the allegations against the accused. Copies of the statement are available in the Library of the House.

British Visas (Teheran)

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to start issuing the full range of British visas in Teheran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As I said to my hon. Friend on 17 January, at column *712*, visas for some categories of visitors from Iran are already issued by our embassy in Tehran. We expect to expand the operation in stages as circumstances allow.

Iran

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for Ministers or officials of the Iranian Government to meet their British opposite numbers in London and Teheran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in regular contact with the Iranians through diplomatic channels in both London and Tehran. There have been occasional contacts at ministerial level.

Commonwealth of Independent States

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to reorganise his Department following the break-up of the former Soviet Union and establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Over the past five months the FCO department that deals with political questions in the former Soviet Union has been reorganised and reinforced to take account of the independence of former Soviet republics. Departments dealing with economic aspects, including the know-how fund, are devoting increased time and resources to the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States; and the redeployment of further resources in the area is now being considered. Interdepartmental co-ordination has also been strengthened.

East Timor

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his Departmental library a copy of the Yorkshire Television's "First Tuesday" programme broadcast on 7 January on the massacre of civilians at the Santa Cruz cemetery in East Timor in November last year; and what recent representations he has made to the Indonesian Government over these murders.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have a copy of the broadcast. The Indonesian authorities have been made fully aware of our views and those of the European Community on the incident.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the continuing occupation of East Timor by Indonesia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indonesian authorities are well aware that we do not recognise their annexation of East Timor. We continue to support the efforts of the UN Secretary-General to bring about a solution.

North Korea

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about how North Korea was able to build a military grade plutonium production reactor outside international safeguards based on blueprints of the United Kingdom military magnox plants at Calder hall, Sellafield.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Technical information about the Magnox reactors at Calder hall, Sellafield has been in the public domain for over 25 years. We continue to urge the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to fulfil her obligations under the non-proliferation treaty and sign an agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency which would place all of her nuclear facilities under safeguards.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom as a depository state for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty was consulted by the respective Governments of North and South Korea during their recent successful negotiations to establish a full nuclear safeguards inspection regime at nuclear facilities in North Korea.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The recent joint declaration between the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea which provides, inter alia, for mutual inspection of each other's nuclear facilities is a wholly bilateral agreement which does not fall within the remit of the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—NPT. While we naturally welcome the conclusion of the agreement, we still look to the DPRK to fulfil her obligations under the NPT and sign a fullscope safeguards agreement with the IAEA.

Soviet Troops

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Governments of the Baltic states on the continuing presence of Soviet troops in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: President Landsbergis of Lithuania raised the matter of former Soviet troops in the Baltic states with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and me when he visited the United Kingdom in October 1991. The President asked Her Majesty's Government for their support in demanding the complete withdrawal of the former Soviet forces. We were happy to give our support.

Although we have not received any direct formal representations from the Baltic states on this matter since October, the Baltic states have raised it since at bilateral and multilateral meetings.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the relevant authorities on the continuing presence of Soviet troops in the Baltic states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: HM ambassador to Russia has raised our concerns over the presence of former Soviet

troops in the Baltic states with the authorities of the Commonwealth of Independent States. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs also discussed this matter with the President of the Russian Federation on 20 January. We have expressed the hope that early agreement will be reached on a timetable for the withdrawal of these forces.

Southern Somalia

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will take steps to ensure that the continued conflict and instability in southern Somalia is on the agenda for the current month's New York summit on the role of the United Nations.

Mrs. Chalker: We do not expect the Heads of Government Security Council summit to address regional issues in detail.

Kenya

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Kenyan Government about the recent detention of Professor Wangari Maathai by the Kenyan authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Professor Wangari Maathai is one of a number of Kenyan citizens arrested for alleged participation in a press conference held on 10 January at which President Moi was accused of planning an imminent military coup.

Professor Maathai has been charged with publishing false rumours under section 66 of the Kenyan penal code and has been released on bail. Her case will be heard on 27 January. She has categorically denied that she was ill-treated while in police custody.

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Appeals (Bournemouth)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against the 1990 rating assessments in the Bournemouth area are outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Appeals against 1990 rating assessments in the Bournemouth area are dealt with by the Dorset valuation and community charge tribunal. At the end of 1991 the tribunal had outstanding some 9,100 such appeals in respect of the whole of Dorset.

Valuation and community charge tribunals are independent bodies. The prioritisation and timing of cases is primarily a matter for them. However, the Department wrote to all English tribunals in June 1991 urging them to progress 1990 list appeals as quickly as possible.

Community Charge Register

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures exist to protect single women listed in the community charge register from being trageted by mail order firms, telephone canvassers and door-to-door salesmen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The extract of the community charges register which each charging authority must hold available for public inspection may show only property addresses and chargepayers' surnames and initial letters of any other names. It may not provide any indication of sex. Registration officers may not supply the extract to any other person except so far as it is necessary to permit inspection.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas where the Boundary Commission is carrying out reviews in the county of Essex.

Mr. Key: The Local Government Boundary Commission is carrying out reviews on the Greater London-Essex boundary and also on the parish boundaries of Rochford district council.

Right to Buy, Northamptonshire

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings were owned by each district council in Northamptonshire at the time that the right to buy was introduced; how many are owned at the latest date; what percentage that is of the original figure; and how many uncompleted applications there are at the latest date.

Mr. Yeo: The information available from local authorities' annual housing investment programme returns is as follows.

Number of dwellings owned by the authority at 1 April

	1980 *(1)*	*1991* *(2)*	*(2) as percentage of (1)*
Corby	13,628	8,143	60
Daventry	6,082	4,133	68
East Northamptonshire	6,047	4,849	80
Kettering	6,626	5,016	76
Northampton	12,925	16,350	126
South Northamptonshire	5,745	3,859	67
Wellingborough	7,750	6,009	78

Right to buy was introduced in October 1980. Changes in local authorities' dwellings stocks include other losses and gains apart from sales through the right to buy. In the case of Northampton district council, the 1991 stock reflects the acquisition of some 6,400 dwellings from the Commission for New Towns in April 1985.

Information on uncompleted applications to these authorities is not collected centrally.

Council Tax

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to relieve householders whose property has been repossessed from the liability to pay either the community charge or the council tax on more than one property.

Mr. Key: Since 1 April 1991 no standard community charge has been payable where the person subject to the charge is the mortgagor and the lender is in possession under the mortgage. We intend to continue this provision under the council tax.

Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is now in a position to announce his decision on the planning appeal regarding Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland, a grade one listed building.

Mr. Yeo: The Secretary of State is in receipt of the inspector's report and will announce his decision soon.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the failures of security in the privatised Property Services Agency that permitted unauthorised individuals access to Government safes and cabinets.

Mr. Yeo: PSA Services has not yet been privatised and is still a Government Department. The accounting officer will be giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on 27 January on the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General which comments on the accounting problems relating to security furniture. The Government will, of course, consider any report the committee makes on this issue.

The computer recording the accounting material had no data on it which would facilitate access to Government safes and cabinets. Unauthorised access to it would not have created any threat to security.

Gipsies

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision on the application by Bassetlaw district council to build a permanent site for gipsy travellers at Fox Covert, Worksop, Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend expects to reach a decision shortly, and I will write to the hon. Member.

Local Authority Members

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to review the present system of payment of allowances to members serving on local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The new system took effect in April 1991. It will be reviewed after a year's operation, in consultation with the local authority associations.

Rents

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the extent to which private landlords reduce the rent charged to their tenants after a rent officer has assessed a market rent for housing benefit subsidy purposes which is substantially lower than the initial rent charged.

Mr. Yeo: We have no evidence as to whether the rents asked by private sector landlords reflect the assessments of market rents provided by rent officers to local authorities for housing benefit purposes. Rent officers interpret the rental market, which is influenced by many factors.

National Parks

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish the Government's response to the Countryside Commission's review of national parks.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today published the Government's response to the national parks review. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

The Government are grateful to the Countryside Commission for initiating a review of the policies and practices of the national parks in England and Wales. The review was undertaken by an independent panel under the chairmanship of Professor Ron Edwards. He and his team are to be congratulated on their work, which was wide ranging and thorough.

The Government reiterate in the strongest terms their commitment to the national parks. We have addressed those recommendations, drawn from the review, which were commended to us by the Countryside Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales. Our response is a positive one which reflects our concern to ensure the future of the parks into the next century and strikes a balance between the park purposes of conservation and public enjoyment on the one hand and the needs of those who live and work in them on the other. We are confident that our response is the firmest assurance to all those who cherish the parks that their future is secure and that the proper protection and management of Britain's finest landscapes is assured.

The response confirms our intention to create all national park authorities as independent bodies, as the Lake District and Peak District already are, though still within the local government framework. We propose further detailed consultation on the membership of national park authorities designed to secure, among other things, truly local representation and to explore the establishment of local consultative bodies for each park to ensure that the views of those who live and work in the parks are fully taken into account in the policies and practices of park authorities.

The Government intend to restate national park purposes to refer expressly to quiet enjoyment and understanding and to conservation of the wildlife and cultural heritage; to take steps to ensure that responsibility for detailed planning in their areas should rest with national park authorities; and to invite local highway authorities, where they have not already done so, to delegate rights of way responsibilities to national park authorities.

The Government's objective is that major development should not take place in the national parks save in exceptional circumstances, but, if it is, the work should be done to high environmental standards. Because of the serious impact that major developments may have on the natural beauty of the parks, applications for such development must be subject to the most rigorous examination. In our response, we have developed a single test against which all major proposals should be considered.

We also intend to consider further the countryside agencies' recommendations that there should be a statutory duty on Ministers and public agencies in the exercise of their responsibilities as they affect national

parks. In considering the wording of such a duty, it will be necessary to recognise that it cannot simply override the purposes or objectives of individual Ministers or public bodies but should be designed to ensure that they take national parks' purposes into account in any situation where there is a potential conflict.

The Countryside Commission endorsed the review panel's conclusion that the New Forest should be formally recognised as a national park with a tailor-made constitution. The New Forest is a uniquely valuable area in landscape and nature conservation terms and it deserves the strongest protection in keeping with its national and international importance, while accepting the review panel's conclusion that it would not be appropriate to establish the New Forest as a national park under the 1949 legislation. We believe, however, that the recommendations put forward by the New Forest committee—on which the national and local government bodies with interests in the forest are represented—provide a sound basis for achieving improved protection. The Government therefore intend to take steps to designate the New Forest area as one of national significance within which the strongest protection of landscape and scenic beauty should apply. With this would be linked a mechanism for funding and statutory status for the committee to reflect its role in co-ordinating the management of the area. The position would be essentially analogous to that of the Broads which enjoys the same degree of protection as a national park but has its own institutional arrangements tailored to the local situation. Following local consultation legislation will be needed to implement these proposals.

The Government look to the Countryside Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales to work closely with the national park authorities in carrying forward those recommendations of the review panel which do not call for direct Government action.

Watch Tower House

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local residents and preservation societies at the prospect of substantial extensions to Watch Tower house in the site zoned as green belt on the Ridgeway at Mill Hill; and if he will give an assurance that he has no plans to alter Government policy in a way that would facilitate further developments on this site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* No representations have been received about proposed extensions to Watch Tower house on the Ridgeway at Mill Hill in the London borough of Barnet.

It is for the local planning authority to consider any applications for planning permission, having regard to their recently adopted unitary development plan and to determine applications in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The Government's policy on green belts remains as set out in planning policy guidance note 2 and circular 12/91. There are no proposals to alter the policy that:

"Inside a Green Belt, approval should not be given, except in very special circumstances, for the construction of new buildings or for the change of use of existing buildings for purposes other than agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, cemeteries, institutions standing in extensive grounds, or other uses appropriate to a rural area".

Renewable Energy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, 13 December, *Official Report*, column *554*, he will list the energy organisations to which he sent the policy planning guidance notes on renewable energy, to which he makes reference.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The energy organisations to which the draft planning policy guidance notes were sent are as follows:

Association of Independent Electricity Producers
Mersey Barrage Company Ltd.
British Wind Energy Association
Severn Tidal Power Group
Office of Electricity Regulation
Combined Heat and Power Association
Water Power Users' Association
Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency
Electricity Association Ltd.
Centre for Alternative Technology
Adaprojects Ltd. (Ecogen Ltd.)
Anglesey Mining plc
Wind Power Systems Ltd.
Northumbrian Water Ltd.
South Wales Electricity
Abbey Produce (Ramsey) Ltd.
Cambridge Health Authority
Oiltools Offshore Services Ltd.
James Paget Hospital
West Beacon Farm Power
UK Wind Farms Ltd.
Resource Conservation plc
Blyth Harbour Wind Farm
J. Stobart & Sons Ltd.
Ren Energy Sys Ltd.
Carters Wind Turbines Ltd.
Windcluster Ltd.
Whitendale Generation Ltd.
Taff-Ely Windfarm Ltd.
Windstar Turbines Ltd.
Cornwall Light and Power Co. Ltd.
West Coast Wind Farms
Aylescott Driers
Cold Northcott Wind Farm Ltd.
Wind Energy Group Ltd.
Yorkshire WT Ltd.
D. Gillson & Son Ltd.
Century Steels Ltd.
Mr. Hector Buckley
Y. W. Enterprises Ltd.
Sutcliffe Hockenhull
Severn Trent Water
Low Wood Products Ltd.
Miss Cooke and Miss Newton
National Power
R. J. Armstrong Evans
Arc Ltd.
Thomas Graveson Ltd.
Blue Circle WM
Aveley Methane Ltd.
Landfill Gas Ltd.
EME Generation Ltd.
Tarmac Econowaste Ltd.
BFI Packington Ltd.
Bidston Methane Ltd.
WWM Mainsprint
NORWEB Generation
Wimpey WM
O'Brien Energy Europe Ltd.
Merseyside Power Trading Ltd.
Summerleaze Ltd.
Darrington Quarries Ltd.
Broom Energy Ltd.
W. Yorks Waste Management
British Coal Corporation
S. E. London CHP Ltd.
Cory Environmental Ltd.

Energy Supplies Ltd.
Northfleet Waste to Energy
Babcock Power Investments Ltd.
Southampton Geothermal Heating Co. Ltd.
Wessex Waste Management
Yorkshire Renewable Energy
Thames Water Utilities
Biogas Generation Ltd
North West Water Ltd.
Arigen Ltd.
Adams Integrated Waste Ltd.
Northumbrian Environmental Management Ltd.
Slough Estates
MANWEB plc
Midlands Electricity plc
Northern Electric plc
South Western Electricity plc
Southern Electricity plc
SEEBOARD plc
London Electricity plc
Yorkshire Electricity Group plc
East Midlands Electricity plc
Eastern Electricity plc
OFFER
Vestas Danish Wind Technology
Renewable Energy Systems Ltd.
UK Atomic Energy Authority
Liquefied Petroleum Gas Industry
Petroleum Industry Association
Onshore Oil Operators' Group
British Nuclear Fuels Ltd.
The National Grid (CEGB)
British Gas plc

In addition to the 100 energy organisations mentioned, comments were also invited from more than 200 other organisations and individuals including local authority associations, professional and planning bodies, and conservation organisations.

PRIME MINISTER

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister what steps Her Majesty's Government intend to take in the current year to achieve full compliance with United Kingdom obligations under article VI of the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy continues to be to work for secure defence at the lowest possible level of armaments, both conventional and nuclear, building on the arms reductions announced by us and others in 1991. The immediate priority is to ensure full compliance in the Commonwealth of Independent States with the arms control undertakings of the former Soviet Union.

United Nations Security Council

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the plans Her Majesty's Government have to promote the role of the United Nations in *(a)* disarmament and *(b)* environmental protection, during the United Kingdom presidency of the United Nations Security Council in 1992.

The Prime Minister: We hope that the high-level meeting of the United Nations Security Council which I shall be chairing on 31 January, will stress the importance the council attaches to arms control, to the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, and to responsibility in the export of conventional arms. We are also playing a full part in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June.

EC (United Kingdom Contribution)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the size of the net contribution made by the United Kingdom to the EC; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so. The Fontainebleau mechanism negotiated in 1984 continues to provide a significant abatement to our contributions, with a cumulative benefit of some £12·5 billion by the end of 1992.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government with regard to President Suharto's accelerated transmigration programme.

Mrs. Chalker: We have not had any recent discussions with the Indonesian Government on this subject.

Bulgaria

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to increase the amount of aid to Bulgaria; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The know-how fund was extended to Bulgaria in February 1991 to provide British advice, skills and training in assisting the transition to democracy and a market economy. In this first year an initial range of projects has been developed involving some £1·3 million of commitments mainly in the financial, management, employment and public administration sectors. I expect the programme to expand as more know-how fund projects are identified.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet his EC counterparts to increase the amount of food aid to Bulgaria; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The need for food aid for central and eastern European countries is kept under close review by the Council and Commission. Aid to these countries will be considered by the Council on 3 February. Neither Her Majesty's Government nor the Commission is aware of any Bulgarian requests for food aid this winter.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Performance Information)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will specify the information to be made available to parents and the general public concerning a school's performance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We issued on 10 January a consultation document covering our proposals for the publication of performance information in 1992. Copies of the document were placed in the Library.

We shall extend the content and coverage of our proposals from 1993 using the powers to be made available under the Education (Schools) Bill.

Special Education

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if Her Majesty's inspectorate will continue to employ inspectors with a specific responsibility for and experience in special educational provision; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what measures he proposes to ensure that the proposed local school inspection teams take account of provision of special education; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what plans he has to ensure that the Department continues to receive information and independent advice on special education from Her Majesty's inspectorate.

Mr. Eggar: Under the Education (Schools) Bill, Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools will be under a duty to keep the Secretary of State informed about the quality, standards and efficiency of education in schools, and to advise the Secretary of State on specific issues either on request or as the chief inspector sees fit. The provision of information and advice on special educational needs will therefore form part of the chief inspector's duties. The arrangements made to meet this responsibility will be a matter for the chief inspector.

The Bill will also place a general duty on registered inspectors to report on quality, standards and efficiency when carrying out inspections under the new arrangements. Provision made for pupils with special educational needs will fall to be considered under each of these headings. I am confident that the chief inspector's guidance to registered inspectors will deal with the need to cover this aspect in every school inspection.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. Eggar: The citizens charter promised publication of a charter for parents and an updated Guide to the national curriculum. The total cost as at 31 December 1991 of producing, distributing and publicising the parents charter was £1·853 million. The estimated cost to date of producing and distributing the guide to the national curriculum is £0·423 million; no publicity costs have been incurred.

Seven-year-old Children (Testing)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why it was decided to abandon the undertaking to local education authorities that the tests for seven-year-old children would not be published.

Mr. Eggar: Parents and others involved in education have every right to see the results nationally and at local level: the assurance given when collecting the results was that neither individual schools' nor individual pupils' results would be identified. This assurance has been honoured by my Department.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science why it was decided not to moderate the tests for seven-year-old school children undertaken in 1991 to ensure consistency of testing between local education authorities.

Mr. Eggar: Consistency of testing seven-year-olds was secured through the use by all schools of standard tests against the clear criteria of the national curriculum; the guidance to all schools provided by the School Examinations and Assessment Council—SEAC—and the duty on local education authorities, under the oversight of SEAC, to monitor and ensure the consistency of their schools' assessments in relation to national standards.

Examination Statistics

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many boys and girls passed one of more A-level subject for each year from 1985-86; and how many pupils gained one or more O-levels from 1985-86 both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the 17-year-old population for A-level subjects and as a percentage of all maintained school leavers for O-level subjects.

Mr. Eggar: For the academic years 1985-86 to 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available, the numbers and percentages of pupils gaining one or more A-level or O-level passes in maintained schools were as are shown in the following table.

School leavers with one or more A/AS passes
Maintained schools—England

	Number of leavers (thousands)			*As a percentage of the 17-year-old population*		
	Boys	*Girls*	*Total*	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Total*
1985-86	46·42	45·45	91·87	12·2	12·5	12·3
1986-87	46·84	46·18	93·02	12·5	12·9	12·7
1987-88	47·19	45·97	93·16	12·9	13·2	13·0
1988-89	46·92	48·68	95·59	12·7	13·8	13·2
1989-90	51·00	54·31	105·31	14·7	16·5	15·6

School leavers with no passes at A-level but with one or more passes at O-level at grade C or better (including passes at GCSE grade A-C and CSE grade 1)
Maintained schools—England

	Number of leavers (thousands)			*As a percentage of leavers from maintained schools*		
	Boys	*Girls*	*Total*	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Total*
1985-86	119·90	139·64	259·55	35·1	42·0	38·5
1986-87	119·10	139·27	258·37	34·9	42·2	38·5
1987-88	112·95	134·44	247·40	36·0	44·7	40·2
1988-89	114·25	129·72	243·96	39·2	46·4	42·8
1989-90	106·57	122·35	228·92	39·1	46·6	42·8

East Devon College of Further Education

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science for each of the financial years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94, whether it is Government policy that any surplus of revenue over expenditure should be at the disposal of the governors of East Devon college of further education at Tiverton or that it should be paid over to the local education authority.

Mr. Eggar: For 1991-92 the treatment of any surplus of revenue over expenditure is determined by the provisions of the scheme for local management of further education colleges in Devon.

The position in 1992-93 and thereafter will be subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament. It is proposed that the balance of a college's income and expenditure in local authority accounts for 1992-93 will transfer to the new corporate body to be established under the legislation. Regulations will be drawn up under which such balances can be determined and attributed to colleges. Wherever possible, that will be by reference to the arrangements set out in the local management scheme for the local authority concerned.

Subject to the financial memoranda agreed between individual colleges and the Further Education Funding Council (England), which, from April 1993, will fund institutions, it is intended that any surplus of revenue over expenditure after that date will be at the disposal of the new corporate bodies.

Higher Education

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of students in advanced education now and in 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There were 1,103,700 higher education students in Great Britain institutions in the academic year 1990-91 compared with 777,800 in 1979-80.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of students attending polytechnics this year; and what was the corresponding figure for 1987.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There were 317,500 students attending polytechnics in England in the academic year 1990-91, compared with 242,200 in 1987.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of students currently in higher and university education; and what were the numbers in 1979, 1983 and 1987.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The numbers of students in higher education in Great Britain universities, polytechnics and colleges, including the Open university and the centrally funded colleges in Scotland in the years 1979, 1983 and 1987 were 777,800, 871,300 and 1,066,700 respectively. Numbers of students in academic year 1990-91, the latest for which information is available, were 1,103,700.

Universities

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessments his Department makes of the comparative level of achievement of British universities relative to those in other countries.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Comparisons between education systems are notoriously difficult. However, statistical comparisons based on internationally accepted definitions show that the proportion of the relevant age group gaining higher education qualifications in the United Kingdom is among the highest in Europe. Her Majesty's inspectorate, as part of its foreign travel programme, compares and contrasts the quality of provision in higher education institutions at home and abroad.

Foreign Students

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of foreign students with places at universities, and the approximate revenue generated.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In the academic year 1990-91, there were 56,409 students from overseas attending full-time courses at universities in Great Britain. Universities received a total of approximately £232 million in tuition fee income from these students.

Illiteracy

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the extent of adult illiteracy in the United Kingdom; what definition he uses of illiteracy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: There are very few adults in the United Kingdom who cannot read or write at all, but there are substantial numbers who cannot cope with the demands of everyday life. They cannot, for example, fill in forms, check pay-slips or give the correct change. Such people are often described as being "functionally illiterate".

The adult literacy and basic skills unit—ALBSU—which advises the Government, estimates that 5·5 million people in England and Wales have some difficulty with reading, writing, spelling and basic mathematics. That cannot be a precise figure, but there is no doubt that there are still many people requiring help.

The Government give high priority to basic skills—that is literacy and numeracy—education for adults. Local education authorities are currently the main providers of this, but central government also gives support, to ALBSU, and through a number of central initiatives. Grants to ALBSU have increased more than six-fold over the past decade, to over £3 million in 1991-92.

The Further and Higher Education Bill, which is currently before Parliament, will strengthen the position of basic skills. The further education funding councils will be under a specific duty to secure adequate provision of basic skills education for adults.

Such provisions should make the best use of whatever facilities and expertise are available and should be readily accessible to local communities.

ENERGY

Renewable Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects the renewable energy advisory group strategy review to be reported to him; and what arrangements he proposes to make to publish its contents.

Mr. Moynihan: The report of the renewable energy advisory group is expected by April and it will be published shortly after that.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his oral statement to the House on 5 November, *Official Report*, columns 329-31, on the 1991 Renewable Energy Order, what is his most up-to-date estimate of the amount of up-and-running installed capacity measured on a declared net capacity basis, on 1 January 1993, 1994 1995, 1996 and 1997, based on an equivalent basis to the 472 MW of capacity to be installed by 1 January 1998.

Mr. Moynihan: Orders setting a non-fossil fuel obligation specify the amounts of non-fossil sourced generating capacity that the regional electricity companies must have available during the periods covered by the order, and the regional electricity companies must satisfy the Office of Electricity Regulation that they have made arrangements to secure that capacity. However, the amount of such capacity that is actually available to the regional electricity companies at any particular time will largely depend on the extent to which new projects are able to obtain planning permission, and any other necessary consents, and to go forward to commissioning.

Major Energy Users Council

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what date he has set for his meeting with the Major Energy Users Council; what is the proposed agenda for the meeting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have offered to meet the Major Energy Users Council to discuss electricity prices; a meeting has been arranged for next month.

Advanced Gas-cooled Reactors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list those advanced gas-cooled reactors belonging to Nuclear Electric which have their main steam and hot reheat steam pipework manufactured from 0·5 per cent. chrome, 0·5 per cent. molybdenum and 0·25 per cent. vanadium (CMV) alloy steel.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is an operational matter for Nuclear Electric plc.

Uranium (Dounreay)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on what date he was first advised of the recorded disappearance of 10·1 kg of highly enriched uranium from Dounreay.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department was advised of the nuclear materials discrepancy at Dounreay on 3 December 1991.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what estimate he has made of loss of revenue to Dounreay reprocessing plant following its closure after the recorded disappearance of 10·1 kg of highly enriched uranium.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. This is a commercial matter for the management of the Atomic Energy Authority.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what aspects of the accounting procedures at Dounreay are to be re-assessed following the recorded disappearance of 10·1 kg of highly enriched uranium from Dounreay.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The inquiry report into the nuclear materials discrepancy at Dounreay has just been received and is being studied by officials of my Department. I will consider what information may be provided when examination of the report and its findings have been completed.

Dounreay

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions in the past three months he has had *(a)* written and *(b)* telephone communication with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority about the operations of Dounreay nuclear reprocessing plant.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have regular contact with the UKAEA regarding all aspects of their activities, including those carried out at Dounreay.

Sudbury House

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the arrangements for disposal of Sudbury House by Nuclear Electric; and what proportion of the proceeds will be taken by the Exchequer.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The arrangements for any disposal of Sudbury House are a commercial matter for Nuclear Electric plc. Any proceeds from disposal would remain in the public sector.

Gas Pipelines

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the process whereby gas pipelines are granted planning permission; what provisions exist regarding public inquiries in relation to gas pipelines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The following procedures apply.

Gas pipelines over 10 miles long which are authorised by the Secretary of State for Energy under section 1 of the Pipelines Act 1962 receive deemed planning permission under section 5 of the Act except in those cases where a local planning authority maintains an objection. In these circumstances a planning inquiry is held.

Gas pipelines 10 miles long or less are covered by section 2 of the Act and must have planning permission from the relevant local planning authority.

British Gas has permitted development rights under the General Development Order 1988 which gives it a general grant of planning permission.

THE ARTS

Works of Art (Exports)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list the items for which the issuing of export licences was withheld on the recommendation of the reviewing committee on the export of works of art during the half-year ended 31 December 1991, specifying in each case the valuation and whether an item was eventually exported or retained, with particulars in the latter event of the acquiring institution; if he will list any items for which licences have been withheld but the final disposal of which is not yet decided, specifying in each case *(a)* the valuation and *(b)* the relevant time limit; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries covering the information given in his reply, including that relating to the outcome in individual cases.

Mr. Renton: The information is as follows:

Description of item	*Valuation* £	*Outcome*
The Bromley Davenport Altarpiece, by Taddeo Gaddi	2,011,500·00	Export licence granted
A documentary urbino dish of Cardinal's hat form	189,975·00	Export licence granted
A drawing, 'A wooded landscape with low hills: a view of the Tiber', by Nicholas Poussin	156,450·00	Purchased jointly by the Ashmolean and Fitzwilliam museums
A drawing, 'A wooded landscape with a River God gathering fruit', by Nicholas Poussin	134,100·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'St. George and the Dragon', by Francesco Di Rossi il Salviati	104,975·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'The head of the Oriental in profile to the left', by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione	201,150·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'The head of a women looking up', by Guido Reni	145,275·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'A reclining nude women lifting a curtain', by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri il Guercino	106,162·50	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'A wooded upland landscape with figures outside the gate of a castle', by Giovanni Francesco Barbieri il Guercino	61,462·25	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'Saint Ivo intervening on behalf of the poor, Christ with Saint Jerome and three saints above', by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona	72,637·50	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'A wooded river landscape with fishermen in a boat', by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona	72,637·50	Export licence refused
A drawing, 'A wooded rover landscape with cascades and three men dragging a net', by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona	268,200·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'The Sacrifice of Isaac' by Giovanni Battista Gaulli il Baciccio	111,750·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'Two women and a baby with a cat', by Francesco Vanni	78,225·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'An allegory of the labours of Hercules', by Ciro Ferri	35,760·00	Purchased by the Fitzwilliam Museum
A drawing, 'Design for a tomb slab of Cardinal Carlo Emanuele Pio Da Carpi', by Gian Lorenzo Bermini	40,230·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'A philosopher pointing to the ground, a youth beside him', by Salvatore Rosa	50,287·50	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'The head of a young boy looking up to the left', by Jan Cossiers	44,700·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'The adoration of the shepherds', by Jusepe de Ribera	83,812·50	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
A drawing, 'A squirrel', by Giovanni da Udine	85,000·00	Decision deferred until after 15 March 1992
An inlaid bronze pyxis	33,525·00	Purchased by the British Museum Society
The Clarence Book of Hours	510,000·00	Export licence granted
A French 19th Century silvered and bronze mirror, 1867, by Barbedienne	110,000·00	Decision deferred until after 16 April 1992
A portrait of Pope Clement VII by Sebastiano del Piombo	6,314,581·00	Decision deferred until after 16 February 1992
The 'Middleham Ring'	45,980·00	Decision deferred until after 16 April 1992
Two paintings of the allegorical tombs of Cadogan and Godolphin by Francesco Monti, Pietro Paltronieri and Nunzio Ferraiuoli	450,000·00	Decision deferred until after 16 February 1992

Description of item	Valuation £	Outcome
A George III silver-gilt dinner service, designed by Robert Adam	251,445·00	Decision deferred until after 16 April 1992

Items in Lieu of Tax

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list the allocations made to public institutions in the United Kingdom during the half-year ended 31 December 1991 of individual works of art and museum objects pre-eminent for national, scientific, historic or artistic interest which have been accepted in satisfaction of inheritance tax, together with information, where applicable, as to conditions or wishes expressed in the matter of allocation by testators or executors; if he will list the works of art and museum objects which are still awaiting allocation with the respective dates of their acceptance in satisfaction of inheritance tax; and whether a press notice will be issued from the Office of Arts and Libraries in the event of any information being given in his reply which has not previously been announced.

Mr. Renton: The information the hon. Gentleman requests is as follows:

Item	To whom allocated	Conditions/wishes expressed
Painting by Lucas de Heere	National Museum of Wales	Conditional
Portrait of Professor Hill by Raeburn	University of Edinburgh	Wish to go to Edinburgh
Harpsichord by Burkat Shudi	University of Edinburgh	Wish to go to Edinburgh
Collection of musical instruments	University of Edinburgh	Wish to go to Edinburgh
Starhemberg Dinner Service	National Trust	Wish to go to National Trust
Louis XV Bas D'armoire	National Trust	Wish to go to National Trust
Collection of English Porcelain	Fitzwilliam Museum	Conditional
Watercolour by Rex Whistler	Museum of London	Wish to go to Museum of London
Portrait of Lady Caroline Morrell by Augustus John	National Portrait Gallery	Wish to go to National Portrait Gallery
Collection of papers by George Bellas Greenough	University College, London	Wish to go to Cambridge University
Two portraits by Gainsborough, one by Rubens and a landscape by Seghers	Royal Scottish Academy	Conditional

Items awaiting allocation	Date of acceptance
Portrait of Beechy	20 April 1990
Collection of drawings by Runciman	26 April 1991
A vintage motor car and two vintage motor cycles	28 November 1991

Press notices have already been issued announcing the acceptance of all of these items and the allocations that have been made to date.

Museums and Galleries (Attendance)

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1991 reported by the national museums and galleries in England for which he is responsible, broken down into the individual institutions, but including their outstations, with figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1990.

Mr. Renton: The estimated number of visitors during 1991 to the 11 national museums and galleries for which I am responsible are as follows:

	Estimated attendance in 1991	Percentage change from 1990
British Museum	5,410,422	+6·5
Imperial War Museum	1,045,144	−16·9
National Gallery	4,300,000	+16·8
National Maritime Museum	579,015	−2·7
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	1,242,422	−3·9
National Portrait Gallery	867,361	+44·1
Natural History Museum	1,500,000	+2·8
Science Museum	2,525,128	−5·9
Tate Gallery	2,436,370	+10·2
Victoria and Albert Museum	1,389,057	+2·4
Wallace Collection	140,143	+3·1
Total	21,435,062	+5·3

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Truro Office

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects to make a decision on the future of his Department's regional office in Truro;

(2) how many jobs will be lost if his Department's Truro office is closed.

Mr. Curry: The location of the Ministry's regional service centre for Devon and Cornwall has been the subject of a further study, the results of which are currently being assessed.

Regional Reorganisation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many jobs will be lost in total as a result of his Department's regional reorganisation; and what are the net financial savings expected.

Mr. Curry: It is projected that the regional reorganisation will result in a net loss of about 150 posts across the country as a whole and a net annual financial saving of about £3 million. The saving will be fully realised in 1993-94, by which time the restructuring, which will improve the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the Ministry's services, will have been completed. Where posts are to be lost, every effort is being made to find staff alternative jobs. We are doing all we can to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Fallen Stock

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimated cost to the industry of the disposal of fallen stock; and what measures he proposes to take to limit the impact of this cost.

Mr. Maclean: The costs of disposing of fallen stock will vary according to the method, location, nature of the carcase, including species, size and condition and the current market prices for animal by-products. It is for the livestock sector, as with other industries, to find ways of disposing of its waste, and to meet the costs involved.

Ear-tagging

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance he proposes to give to farmers to offset the costs of ear-tagging livestock.

Mr. Maclean: Farmers meet the cost of statutory cattle and deer identification, and of other identification measures for commercial purposes. I have no plans to alter this.

Sea Fish Industry Authority

Mr. Franks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make an announcement about the review of the Sea Fish Industry Authority carried out by fisheries departments.

Mr. Curry *[pursuant to his reply, 20 November 1991, c. 189]:* The Government have carefully considered the additional comments received from the fishing industry and other interested parties about our proposals for action arising from the review of the Sea Fish Industry Authority —SFIA.

Fisheries Ministers have now reached decisions as follows. We call on the SFIA board to make proposals to reduce the levy by £1 to £7·40 a tonne. This would represent a substantial reduction in the cost of the SFIA to the industry, as the majority of those who pay the levy clearly want. At the same time, a reduction to £7·40 rather than £7, as originally proposed, would take into account that some of the SFIA's costs have increased, and allow scope for a somewhat greater range of services to continue.

Subject to the statutory procedures for publicising a proposal to change the levy, it will be for the SFIA board to decide on the exact range of operations to be continued at this new rate. It would be open to the board to include an element of generic advertising which parts of the industry still support.

Ministers have further decided that the levy should not be extended to salmon or trout, or to canned and bottled fish, nor applied on an ad valorem basis; and that the conversion rates for deriving the levy rate on fish fillets should remain unchanged.

We are asking the SFIA to agree plans with the industry for greater industry participation in the advisory committees which will cover the work of SFIA departments. We look to the industry to co-ordinate their nominations for seats on the SFIA board.

We request the chairman of the SFIA to follow up the reviewers' recommendations for improvements in its organisation, structure and efficiency, in consultations with fisheries departments.

Ministers believe that this programme of action will help the industry and the SFIA to continue to promote an efficient seafish industry and one which will be able to meet the challenges for the future.

WALES

Integrated Development, South Wales

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who are the members of the monitoring committee of the industrial south Wales integrated development operation; what are their occupations and who appoints them.

Mr. David Hunt: There are 72 members of the industrial south Wales integrated development operation monitoring committee, comprising officers representing central and local government, other public and private sector bodies, and the European Commission, under the chairmanship of the Welsh Office, which is responsible for appointing members to the committee.

Mineral Policy

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review the mineral policy guidance notes of January 1988 to take into account the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Minerals planning guidance notes—MPGs—are kept continuously under review in order to take account of legislative and other changes. Two MPGs were issued in January 1988—MPG1 "General Considerations and the Development Plan System" and MPG2 "Applications, Provisions and

Conditions"—and we intend to review MPG1 to reflect recent changes in the development plans system. A draft is expected to issue for consultation later this year.

Mineral Planning

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to review mineral planning guidance note 3 on opencast coal mining and mineral planning guidance note 6 on guidelines for aggregates provision.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Although its operation is continuously monitored, there are no current plans to revise minerals planning guidance note 3. Minerals planning guidance note 6 on aggregates provision is currently being revised and a draft is expected to issue for consultation later this year.

If the hon. Gentleman has any representations he wishes to make on these notes I would, of course, be happy to consider them.

Coal Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total annual coal tonnage currently produced in the coalfield areas of Wales and used in power stations outside Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Between 350,000 and 400,000 tonnes of Welsh coal are used annually in power stations outside Wales.

Waste Disposal Sites

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has been made by his Department on the impact of the changes in public sector waste disposal upon the number of waste disposal sites in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. Local authorities have yet to finalise their new arrangements for waste disposal.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all disused mineral excavation sites used as general waste disposal sites in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not maintained centrally.

Traffic Congestion

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will meet Shotton town council to discuss his plans to build the third Dee crossing;

(2) if he will meet Queensferry town council to discuss plans to alleviate traffic congestion;

(3) if he will meet the community council of Sealand to discuss the impact of traffic congestion upon the environment;

(4) if he will meet Connahs Quay town council to discuss the impact of traffic congestion upon the environment.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies I gave him on 20 December 1991, at column *361*, and 14 January 1992, at columns *547-48*.

School Inspectors

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his response to the Adams report on the future of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools service in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 13 January 1992, at column *506*.

National Museum of Wales

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1991 reported by the National Museum of Wales, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1990.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A total of 683,743 people visited the National Museum of Wales during 1991, an increase of nearly 2 per cent. on the attendance reported by 1990.

Neath and Port Talbot Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when it is now expected that the first contract will be entered into for the building of the new Neath and Port Talbot general hospital; and how much money has been allocated for its construction in each year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Subject to availability of funds, I understand that West Glamorgan health authority anticipates work commencing towards the end of 1992. Details of the all-Wales capital building programme for 1992-93, and the funds to be allocated for each constituent scheme will be announced by my right hon. Friend in due course.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his parliamentary answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North, 15 January, *Official Report*, column *587-88*, what will be the remuneration of the chairman of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales, the chairman of the Higher Education Council for Wales and the chief executive of the two councils; and if he will state their expected hours of work, terms of secondment and length of term of appointment.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Chairman of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales will be paid £18,500 on the basis of two days commitment a week. The chairman of the Higher Education Funding Council will be paid £10,000 on the basis of one day a week. The chief executive will be paid £50,000 per annum. The appointments will not be made until the Further and Higher Education Bill receives Royal Assent. The chairman will be appointed for a three-year term and the chief executive for five years. The individuals will be engaged as chairmen and chief executive-designate from dates still to be determined.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy considerations will govern his choice of chairman or chairwoman for the Development Board for Rural Wales for the three years commencing 1 April; and when he expects to make an announcement.

Mr. David Hunt: I always give the very fullest consideration to all relevant factors relating to each public appointment for which I have responsibility. I will announce this appointment at the appropriate time in the light of these considerations.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Alcohol Tax

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to protect the United Kingdom spirits industry against the effect of EC proposals in relation to taxation of spirits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 13 January, at columns *444-45*.

Share Ownership

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *445*, what percentage of the adult population own shares in *(a)* privatisation issues and Abbey National combined only, *(b)* privatisation issues and TSB combined only and *(c)* privatisation, Abbey National and TSB combined only.

Mr. Maude: The 1991 Treasury-stock exchange survey showed that 1 per cent. of the adult population in Great Britain had combined shareholdings in Abbey National and privatisation issues only. Figures for combined shareholdings in TSB and privatisation issues only and combined shareholdings in Abbey National, TSB and privatisation issues only are not available.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Blair: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the latest corporate plan of the Central Office of Information.

Mr. Maples: The Central Office of Information's corporate plan is commercially sensitive and contains information that would weaken COI's negotiating position if it were disclosed. I do not therefore propose placing a copy of the corporate plan in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth's letter of 29 August 1991 about Mr. A. Wiles of Rugby.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 21 January. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, (1) with the current tax allowances and reliefs, (2) limiting all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, (3) limiting relief on contributions to personal pensions to the basic rate and (4) limiting relief on employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes to the basic rate, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected;

(2) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, (1) limiting relief on contributions to personal pensions and occupational pension schemes to the basic rate, and (2) combining (1) with a limiting of all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected;

(3) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, and limiting all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, (1) limiting relief on contributions to personal pensions to the basic rate, and (2) limiting relief on employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes to the basic rate, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that imposition of the specified limits for allowances and reliefs within the current income tax system would yield the following amounts in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income:

Limit £	*Yield* £ *million*
10,000	590
15,000	240
20,000	140

After restriction of the relevant allowances and reliefs to the basic rate, the estimated further yield from imposing the specified limits would be as follows:

Full year yield at 1991-92 incomes levels

£ *million*

After restriction to the basic rate of:	*Limit for total allowances and reliefs* £10,000	£15,000	£20,000
(a) All personal alllowances except the basic personal allowance	510	230	130
(b) Relief for personal pension contributions	490	190	110
(c) Relief for employees' contribution to occupational pension schemes	520	230	130
(d) Allowances and reliefs in *(a)* and *(b)*	440	190	110
(e) Allowances and reliefs in *(a)* and *(c)*	480	220	130
(f) Reliefs in *(b)* and *(c)*	430	180	110
(g) Allowances and reliefs in *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*	420	180	110

The number of people with total allowances and reliefs in excess of £10,000 is about 635,000. The corresponding figures for £15,000 and £20,000 are about 75,000 and 35,000 respectively. The estimates of revenue yield do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of the changes. It is not possible to provide detailed information for 1992-93.

Life Expectancy

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the life expectancy rates for each year between 1985-86 and 1990-91 for males and females for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern

Ireland, *(e)* Great Britain and *(f)* each of the member states of the European Community; and what information he has on (i) Finland, (ii) Norway, (iii) Sweden and (iv) Switzerland for the same period.

Mr. Maples: The information that is currently available is given in the table. Expectations of life are normally calculated for calendar years, but for some of the countries outside the United Kingdom the expectations are the average for three or more years centred on the year in the heading to the column.

Expectation of life at birth (years) in the calendar years 1985-90

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Males						
Scotland	69·9	70·0	70·4	70·4	70·5	71·1
England	71·9	72·1	72·5	72·6	72·9	73·2
Wales	71·0	71·3	71·8	72·3	72·3	72·7
Northern Ireland	70·2	70·3	70·9	70·7	71·3	71·8
Great Britain	71·7	71·9	72·3	72·4	72·6	72·9
Belgium	—	—	—	—	72·4	—
Denmark	71·6	71·7	—	—	72·0	—
France	71·3	71·5	72·0	—	72·5	—
Germany	71·5	—	—	—	72·6	—
Greece	—	—	—	74·2	—	—
Ireland	70·4	—	—	—	71·0	—
Italy	—	—	—	73·2	—	—
Luxembourg	70·6	70·6	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	73·0	—	—	—	73·7	—
Portugal	—	70·2	70·7	—	70·9	—
Spain	72·5	—	73·4	—	—	—
United Kingdom	71·7	71·9	72·3	72·4	72·6	72·9
Finland	—	70·5	—	—	—	—
Norway	—	—	72·8	—	—	—
Sweden	—	—	74·2	—	—	—
Switzerland	—	—	—	73·9	—	—
Females						
Scotland	75·7	76·1	76·4	76·6	76·1	76·8
England	77·5	77·8	78·1	78·1	78·2	78·6
Wales	77·0	77·4	77·7	78·0	77·8	78·6
Northern Ireland	76·3	76·5	77·0	76·7	77·1	77·4
Great Britain	77·3	77·6	77·9	78·0	78·0	78·4
Belgium	—	—	—	—	79·0	—
Denmark	77·5	77·6	—	—	77·7	—
France	79·5	79·7	80·3	—	80·7	—
Germany	78·1	—	—	—	79·0	—
Greece	—	—	—	79·3	—	—
Ireland	76·0	—	—	—	77·0	—
Italy	77·3	—	—	79·7	—	—
Luxembourg	—	77·9	—	—	—	—
Netherlands	79·6	—	—	—	79·9	—
Portugal	—	77·1	77·5	—	77·9	—
Spain	78·6	—	80·1	—	—	—
United Kingdom	77·3	77·6	77·9	78·0	78·0	78·4
Finland	—	78·7	—	—	—	—
Norway	—	—	79·6	—	—	—
Sweden	—	—	80·2	—	—	—
Switzerland	—	—	—	80·7	—	—

Sources: Government Actuary's Department and United Nations and EC publications.

European Parliament Budget

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking following the adoption by the European Parliament of a budget for 1992 in excess of that permitted by Community legislation.

Mr. Maude: In view of doubts about the legality of the budget adopted by the European Parliament, the Council is considering the basis for legal action later this month.

In the mean time the Government do not consider that they should treat the budget as agreed; or that contributions by the United Kingdom, in excess of the amounts required under Community legislation in the event of a budget not having been adopted, may be paid directly out of the Consolidated Fund under section 2(3) of the European Communities Act 1992, but will instead have to be paid out of moneys voted by Parliament in estimates. Parliamentary approval of this new service will be sought in a new estimate for the budget of the European Communities—class XX, vote 1. Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £150 million monthly will be met from repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund. An advance was made on 3 January 1992 in respect of the first instalment.

Departmental Staff

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of staff in post in central Government Departments at 1 October 1991.

Mr. Meller: On 1 October 1991 there were 561,903 staff in post in central Government. Of those, 498,735 were non-industrials and 63,168 were classified as being in industrial work.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Accounts

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made on the implementation of the EC directive on small and medium-sized company accounts.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has today issued a consultation document inviting comments on draft regulations to implement the EC directive on small and medium-sized company accounts.

These draft regulations, and our decision to bring the directive into force well in advance of the required date, give a clear indication of the Government's commitment to continue to reduce the regulatory burden on small companies.

The directive enables EC member states to reduce accounting requirements, and to increase the maximum financial limits defining small and medium-sized companies by 25 per cent.

In addition to implementing the directive, the regulations would exempt small companies from a number of existing accounting requirements, as foreshadowed in the current programme of work under the deregulation initiative, which I announced on 18 December 1990.

Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library. Views are invited by 19 March.

Environmental Information

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Her Majesty's Government intends to take additional powers to require companies to provide information on environmental matters.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 contains requirements for companies carrying out prescribed processes to provide information on environmental matters to enforcing authorities and inspectors, and for enforcing authorities to maintain public registers. The Government do not see any need for additional powers at present.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the results in increased trade that resulted from visits made by Ministers within his Department to Iraq in the past four years.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 20 January 1991]:* Only one DTI Minister has visited Iraq in the past four years. The visit was to attend the meeting of the UK-Iraq joint commission in 1988. It is impossible to gauge its effect on bilateral trade.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Since the launch of the citizens charter the Home Office has not incurred any production, distribution or publicity costs in taking the initiative forward.

Armley Prison

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations have been made to him over the past year about staffing levels at Her Majesty's prison, Armley; and what concern has been expressed about the number of staff available to search visitors with hand-held metal-detecting equipment.

Mrs. Rumbold: Staffing levels at Her Majesty's prison, Leeds, were the subject of discussions between management and the local branch of the Prison Officers Association in July 1991 and new target staffing figures have been agreed. The availability of staff for searching is an area which has been identified for further review. Leeds is one of the prisons holding category A inmates for which the Home Secretary has agreed X-ray machines and walk-through metal detectors should be provided. An order has been placed for the equipment and Leeds should receive it in the next few weeks. Hand-held metal detectors are available for use by staff in the visits area and are used where warranted by the circumstances.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when hand-held metal-detecting equipment for searching visitors was first made available at Her Majesty's prison, Armley; and on how many days since then the equipment has not been used to search visitors because of insufficient staff.

Mrs. Rumbold: The date when hand-held metal detectors were first issued to Her Majesty's prison, Armley is not readily available but was prior to October 1986.

The equipment is used to screen-selected visitors including those to prisoners considered to present a high risk to security. There is no record of detectors not being used because of a shortage of staff.

Remand Prisoners, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice was given to prison authorities over the placing of prisoners on remand for offences arising from a violent incident in Bradford earlier this year.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand from the chief constable of West Yorkshire and the governor of Leeds prison that it was not considered necessary to make special arrangements in respect of the location of the prisoners concerned. No advice from the police on the question of location was therefore passed to the prison.

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Prison Security

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will arrange for the installation of X-ray and metal detecting equipment at Her Majesty's prison, Armley, Leeds, to be expedited; and what steps are being taken to ensure that sufficient staff are available to ensure that the equipment will be operational at all times;

(2) by what date all of Her Majesty's prisons within the United Kingdom will have X-ray and metal-detecting equipment available; and whether additional staff will be required at any of Her Majesty's prisons to ensure such equipment is operational at all times.

Mrs. Rumbold: As my right hon. Friend announced following the report of the inquiry by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons into the escape of two prisoners from Her Majesty's prison Brixton on 7 July 1991, it is intended to install X-ray machines and metal detector portals into prisons holding category A prisoners. His statement concerned prisons in England and Wales, the position in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland.

A contract for the provision of X-ray machines to 23 designated prisons has been let. Deliveries will commence in February and continue into May. Deliveries are being arranged so that each prison, including Her Majesty's prison Leeds will have one X-ray machine by 31 March 1992 with further machines being supplied later.

Staffing requirements will be determined by the area manager for each establishment. It is anticipated that additional staff will be required and financial provision has been made.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is being given to the staff of Her Majesty's prisons within the United Kingdom in the operation of X-ray and metal-detecting equipment.

Mrs. Rumbold: The contract which has been let to supply the X-ray machine to selected prisons in England and Wales includes basic training, of one day's duration, for 20 staff from each establishment and supervisors' training, of two days duration, for two staff from each establishment. Additional training in the interpretation of X-ray pictures is being arranged.

In addition, arrangements are being made to train a radiation protection supervisor for each establishment. Training in the use of metal detectors is much more straightforward and will be provided at the establishment by prison staff.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total cost of supplying x-ray and metal-detecting equipment to prisons in the United Kingdom in the current year; where the equipment is manufactured; what is the minimum delivery date; and what is the total cost of training staff in the use of such equipment.

Mrs. Rumbold: The estimated cost of supplying x-ray machines to selected prisons in England and Wales in 1992 is £1·6 million. Metal detecting equipment will cost a further £75,000.

The equipment is manufactured in Croydon. It is estimated an initial delivery of one machine per establishment will be completed by 31 March with the remaining machines installed by the end of May.

Metal detector portals are purchased as required.

The total cost of training staff to use this equipment is estimated at £150,000.

Immigration Rules

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to make changes in the immigration rules.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have today laid before Parliament a statement of changes in the immigration rules which adds to the list of countries and territorial entities whose nationals need visas for the United Kingdom, the following former constituent republics of the Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Moldovia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. The effect of this will be to ensure that those Soviet nationals who required visas continue to do so. At the same time the opportunity has been taken to remove from the list the United States Pacific trust territories for which a visa requirement is no longer necessary.

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Coopers and Lybrand group have assisted my Department with 10 projects since 1989. Details are as follows:

1989

1. Review of the suitability and performance of PIMIS in the Glasgow/Liverpool Passport Office.
2. External Audit: Justice Clerk's Account.

1990-91

3. Magistrates Courts Agency Costings of the start-up and running.
4. Review of EFS paperwork.

5. MIS Consultancy.
6. Review of MICROB.
7. Restructuring of HMIC.
8. Review of Computer Production Planning Systems (MICROSS).

1991-92

9. Warehouse Distribution System for Supply and Transport Branch.
10. MIS for Prison Service Industries and Farms.

Royal Navy Reserve

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions when port divers from the Royal Navy Reserve have rendered assistance to police and other civil authorities in England and Wales in the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the effect of the closure of the Royal Navy Reserve port diving branch on such authorities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not held centrally, but, as far as I am aware, there have been no occasions when such assistance has been rendered in England and Wales during the last five years and I do not anticipate that the closure of the Royal Navy Reserve port diving branch will have any effect on such authorities.

Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if privately run prisons will take prison inmates who are on rule 43.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the same prison rules that exist in state run prisons will apply to privately run prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes, the substance of the rules will largely remain the same. Some changes will however be necessary to reflect the different terminologies in use in the two systems and the different circumstances, such as the division of a governor's duties between the director and the controller of a contracted-out prison.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will appoint boards of visitors of privately run prisons; whom they will be responsible to in making observations on the running of such prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: As in the case of other boards of visitors, members of boards of visitors of privately run prisons will be appointed by the Home Secretary under section 6(2) of the Prison Act 1952 and will be required to make an annual report to him under prison rule 97. They will have the same right of access to him to make comments and observations as boards of visitors in state-run prisons.

Empty Commercial Premises

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to stop unauthorised entry into, and trading use of, empty commercial premises.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published in November a consultation paper on squatting which considers the problems caused by the unlawful occupation of commercial premises. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library. The Government will decide what form any further action should take in the light of the responses to this consultation exercise.

Obscene Publications

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, following the publication of the Marquis de Sade's "Juliette", he has any plans to meet book publishers in the United Kingdom to discuss the publication of books openly advocating sadism, torture, child abuse and other such practices.

Mr. John Patten: I have no plans to do so. The Government in this country have no powers to ban or censor books or other publications. It is for publishers to ensure that they abide by the criminal law. If they do not, they can be prosecuted and punished, but Ministers cannot intervene in this.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received concerning the publication of the book, "Juliette," by the Marquis de Sade.

Mr. John Patten: I have received a number of representations from Members of Parliament and others.

Sexual Offences

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what was the average length of sentence of imprisonment imposed in each of the last 10 years upon offenders convicted of *(a)* rape, *(b)* buggery and indecency between males, *(c)* indecent assaults on adults, *(d)* gross indecency between children, and *(e)* other sexual offences;

(2) how many individuals convicted of offences of *(a)* sexual assaults on an adult, *(b)* buggery or indecency between males, *(c)* rape, and *(d)* gross indecency with a child were given sentences of (i) immediate imprisonment, (ii) suspended imprisonment, (iii) community service, (iv) probation, (v) a fine, and (vi) discharge in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: The information for England and Wales for the years 1980, 1985, 1987, 1988 and 1989 is given in the tables. To produce further information for the other years requested would involve disproportionate cost. The 1990 data are not yet available.

Table A Number of offenders sentenced to immediate custody and average length of sentence imposed for certain sexual offences by type of court 1980, 1985, 1987, 1988 and 1989

England and Wales

Offence	Year	Magistrates' Courts: Total immediate custody	Magistrates' Courts: Average sentence length (months)	Crown Court: Total immediate custody[1]	Crown Court: Average sentence length (months)
Rape	1980	2	3	296	44
	1985	—	—	310	54
	1987	—	—	325	75
	1988	—	—	387	75
	1989	—	—	433	75
Buggery and indecency between males	1980	7	4	142	34
	1985	2	5	190	32
	1987	6	5	222	43
	1988	5	[2]	246	43
	1989	2	3	203	42
Indecent assaults on adults	1980	50	4	64	12
	1985	64	4	133	14
	1987	49	4	208	23
	1988	47	3	237	22
	1989	48	4	289	23
Gross indecency with children	1980	13	6	24	13
	1985	23	4	56	14
	1987	11	3	92	13
	1988	10	5	87	13
	1989	9	3	59	11
Other sexual (indictable) offences	1980	170	4	685	23
	1985	185	4	916	22
	1987	142	4	1,268	26
	1988	129	4	1,292	25
	1989	73	4	1,247	27

[1] Excludes 'Lifers' if which:—
In 1980 there were 4 for rape and 2 for buggery and indecency between males;
In 1985 there were 9 for rape and 1 for other sexual (indictable) offences;
In 1987 there were 12 for rape and 1 for buggery and indecency between males and 1 for other sexual (indictable) offences;
In 1988 there were 10 for rape and 2 for buggery and indecency between males and 1 for other sexual (indictable) offences; and
In 1989 there were 12 for rape, 6 for buggery and indecency between males and 1 for other sexual (indictable) offences.
[2] Denotes less than one month.

Table B Number of offenders sentenced for certain sexual offences by type of court and result 1980, 1985, 1987, 1988 and 1989

England and Wales

Offence	Year	Total sent.	Imm. custody	Fully suspended sentence	Community service order	Probation order	Fine	Absent or conditional discharge	Other
Magistrates' courts									
Indecent assault on an adult	1980	741	50	34	7	122	316	120	92
	1985	561	64	40	17	126	170	87	57
	1987	516	49	31	14	122	165	72	63
	1988	593	47	43	11	122	209	88	73
	1989	663	48	40	16	125	238	129	67
Buggery and indecency between males	1980	1,489	7	23	1	31	1,291	118	18
	1985	611	2	4	1	17	493	83	11
	1987	874	6	6	—	22	709	116	15
	1988	1,233	5	15	3	30	1,034	129	17
	1989	1,391	2	9	3	24	1,194	145	14
Rape	1980	9	2	—	—	—	—	—	7
	1985	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
	1987	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
	1988	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
	1989	3	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
Gross indecency with children	1980	211	13	35	—	70	52	23	18
	1985	177	23	17	3	82	24	16	12
	1987	117	11	7	1	50	25	10	13
	1988	99	10	8	1	45	18	12	5
	1989	100	9	10	3	40	16	11	11
Crown Court									
Indecent	1980	133	64	25	6	11	10	10	7

Offence	Year	Total sent	Imm. custody	Fully suspended sentence	Community service order	Probation order	Fine	Absent or conditional discharge	Other
assault on an adult	1985	213	133	25	4	24	8	8	11
	1987	323	208	42	5	31	18	3	16
	1988	368	237	54	4	29	14	12	18
	1989	455	289	67	7	44	16	10	22
Buggery and indecency between males	1980	351	144	58	2	23	89	20	15
	1985	362	190	33	8	27	68	27	9
	1987	333	223	29	5	25	22	19	10
	1988	428	248	35	4	42	54	24	21
	1989	365	209	37	2	31	46	25	15
Rape	1980	326	300	4	3	3	—	—	16
	1985	341	319	5	—	—	—	—	17
	1987	347	337	—	—	—	—	—	10
	1988	418	397	2	—	3	—	1	15
	1989	473	445	2	1	4	—	—	21
Gross indecency with children	1980	54	24	17	—	9	2	—	2
	1985	92	56	15	—	13	5	1	2
	1987	132	92	18	1	17	2	1	1
	1988	147	87	25	1	24	6	2	2
	1989	119	59	15	4	30	7	2	2

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were *(a)* convicted of and *(b)* cautioned for indecent exposure in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: Information for England and Wales from 1980 to 1989 on the number of offenders convicted and cautioned for the offence of indecent exposure is given in the table. This information is published annually in volumes 1, 2, and 4 of the "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, Supplementary Tables", copies of which are in the Library. Figures for 1990 are not yet available.

Number of offenders convicted and cautioned for indecent exposure 1980-1989 England and Wales

Year	Convictions	Cautions
1980	1,890	225
1981	1,613	248
1982	1,568	193
1983	1,433	203
1984	1,326	231
1985	1,229	259
1986	1,081	253
1987	1,030	281
1988	1,163	295
1989	1,054	277

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to record locally and nationally the number of homosexual assaults on male prisoners in United Kingdom jails.

Mrs. Rumbold: The current prison service policy is that details of all assaults are recorded, including homosexual assaults. Investigations are made as appropriate, but the system at present does not allow for easy retrieval of information relating specifically to homosexual assaults.

The reporting of incidents by prison establishments in England and Wales is currently under review, as is the system for the storage and retrieval of information about incidents. It is envisaged that, following the review of incident reporting procedures, information about the more serious homosexual assaults, that is those involving a police investigation, will be more readily identifiable in the future.

Vehicle Security Devices

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce regulations to require new cars to be equipped with effective alarms and deadlocking.

Mr. John Patten: No. It would be a breach of European Community law for the Government to introduce separate national legislation requiring new cars to be fitted with alarms and dead locks, since this would constitute a barrier to trade with other member states.

The Department of Transport is therefore examining how far the British standard on vehicle security, which include dead locks, might form the basis of a revised EC directive on vehicle security. That Department, with the support of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, is currently negotiating in the motor vehicles working group of the European Commission for part one of the new British standard, on mechanical locking systems, to be incorporated in a new directive. It is hoped that agreement on this will be reached soon. These efforts have my full support and that of my right hon. Friend.

In the meantime, my right hon. Friend is encouraging the motor manufacturers to adopt voluntarily the British standard for all new cars.

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders report that alarms are now available as standard, or at point of sale, on 95 per cent. of new vehicle models sold in the United Kingdom.

Joy Riding

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will take steps to educate young people aged 14 years or less in the dangers of car theft and joy riding.

Mr. John Patten: A number of useful steps in this area have already been taken. Last April, I launched the Association of British Insurers' excellent video, "Think Again", which illustrates the dangers of so-called joy riding. This has now been widely distributed to schools and youth clubs.

We have also announced that 1992 is to be Car Crime Prevention Year. This should provide the opportunity for many other initiatives aimed at informing young people of the dangers of car theft and discouraging them from taking cars.

And, although they are not aimed primarily at young people aged 14 or less, there is in existence across the country an extensive range of local motor projects for young people. These include the police, probation services and voluntary agencies and aim to educate the participants on the dangers of car theft and to instil in them a responsible and law abiding attitude to the use of motor vehicles.

HEALTH

GP Contracts

12. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implementation of the GPs' contract.

Mr. Waldegrave: GPs have responded positively to the challenges and opportunities of the new contract. Patients are enjoying greater choice, surgeries now offer a wider range of services, and most GPs are hitting ambitious targets for cervical cytology screening and childhood immunisation. Most importantly, patient satisfaction has improved significantly.

Food Premises (Registration)

13. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will issue regulations upon the registration of food handling and of premises serving food.

Mr. Dorrell: The Food Premises (Registration) Regulations 1991 were laid before Parliament on 16 December 1991 and will take effect from 1 February 1992.

"The Health of the Nation"

14. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the main issue raised by those consulted on the Green Paper, "The Health of the Nation".

18. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which were the main issues raised by representations made to him following consultation on the Green Paper, "The Health of the Nation".

Mr. Waldegrave: The main feature of consultation was the very large level of support for a strategic approach to improve the nation's health. The responses also addressed a considerable number of individual issues, with considerable emphasis placed on the importance of tackling smoking.

Junior Doctors (Salaries)

15. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new money has been found to improve the salaries of junior doctors.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have accepted the recommendations of the Doctors and Dentists Review Body on rates of pay for out-of-hours work by junior doctors. These are estimated to cost some £36 million in a full year in England.

Abortion Act 1967

16. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will review the workings of the conscience clause of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In response to the concern expressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the position of ancillary staff such as porters, hospital managers have been asked to apply the principle of section 4 of the Abortion Act—"the conscience clause"—to any member of this group who expresses a conscientious objection to direct participation in the handling of fetuses and fetal tissue.

NHS Performance

17. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available on the general performance of the national health service since 1 April 1991.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 14 January the Department published a report, "NHS Reforms—the First Six Months", detailing the improvements which have already been made since the introduction of the reforms in April 1991. Copies of the report have been sent to all hon. Members representing English constituencies and placed in the Library.

South Manchester Health Authority

19. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairman of South Manchester health authority to discuss the maternity unit.

Mr. Dorrell: I wrote to Mr. Peter Hadfield, the chairman of South Manchester health authority, on 18 December 1991 about his authority's proposals to rationalise maternity services. I have not met him to discuss these.

Health Matters (Mid-Essex)

20. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to visit the chairman of the North East Thames regional health authority to discuss health matters in Mid-Essex.

Mr. Dorrell: I have no present plans to do so.

NHS Trusts

22. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-executive directors have now been appointed to the hospitals and units in the west midlands in the second wave of trusts; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Twenty-eight non-executive directors have been appointed to six NHS trusts in the west midlands, and two further appointments are under consideration.

28. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to meet the chairman of the Oxfordshire district health authority to discuss applications for trust status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have at present no plans for such a meeting.

NHS, Leicestershire

23. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on developments in the national health service in Leicestershire.

Mr. Dorrell: Leicestershire health authority and Leicestershire family health services authority have increased patient activity on all fronts, and made important developments on insulin cell implant surgery and the purchase of a magnetic resonance imager[1] for Leicester royal infirmary, while increasing expenditure by almost £2 million on GP premises this year.

[1]an initial £1 million has been set aside for this equipment

Health Care (European Co-operation)

24. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met his European counterparts to discuss European co-operation in health care provision.

Mr. Dorrell: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State attended an inter-governmental conference of European Community Health Ministers, in the Netherlands, from 8 to 10 October last year. Its theme was "critical choices" in the provision of health care.

NHS Reform

25. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what results are following from improved health outcome measurements in respect of the application of the principle that money should follow the patient.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: District health authorities and GP fund holders are now able to use the contracting system to secure improved health services for their residents. This has facilitated an increased emphasis on the development of coherent health needs assessment and health outcome measures, supported by Government initiatives such as the establishment of a central health outcome unit to co-ordinate developments.

Palliative Medicine

26. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by the national health service in the practice of palliative medicine, including hospice provisions, since 1987; what plans he has for the future of palliative medicine in the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As in all fields of medicine, changes in palliative medicine are continually being made. Its recognition as a specialty in its own right is an indication that the medical profession itself acknowledges the progress which has been made.

This country has a reputation as a world leader in the fields of palliative medicine and hospice care. The Government fully recognise the importance of the voluntary hospice movement in providing care and support for terminally ill people and their families. Our commitment has been underlined in the past two years by the allocation of £25 million to health authorities specifically to enable them to increase the support they give to hospices and similar organisations. This year the estimated total national health service contribution to voluntary hospices, including central funding, amounts to £41 million. The number of voluntary hospices has more than doubled in the past 10 years; there are now well over 100 in-patient units providing over 1,900 beds, and over 150 day units offering some 1,500 places.

We welcome the growing partnership between the national health service and the voluntary hospice movement. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked the standing medical and standing nursing and midwifery advisory committees to review the organisation of palliative care services and the measurement of their performance. The review is expected to be completed in the first half of this year.

NHS Building Schemes

27. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many major national health service building schemes have been completed since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: Since 1979, over 600 building schemes, each costing over £1 million, have been completed. A further 400 such schemes are currently at various stages of planning, design and construction. This is the largest sustained building programme in the history of the NHS.

Residential Social Work

29. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy on residential social work.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Residential care will continue to form a significant sector in the spectrum of social services provision for adults and children. The Registered Homes Act 1984 and the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations provide the legislative framework for the maintenance of proper standards of service in residential establishments, including the protection of vulnerable people—adults and children. This will be helped by the introduction last year of independent inspection units in local authorities.

The Department's social services training support programme, which is increased by £4·2 million to a total of £29 million in 1992-93, will again improve the availability of training for social services staff, including those who work in residential homes. From April this year, the programme will include a new initiative aimed at boosting the qualifying training of officers in charge of local authority maintained and controlled residential homes for children.

Body Scanners

30. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-body scanners are in use by the national health service at present; what was the number in 1979, 1983 and 1987; and what plans he has for additional scanners to be provided.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Whole-body scanners may refer to either computerised tomography or magnetic resonance machines. The number of whole-body scanners of both types available for use in the NHS in England, including special health authorities and NHS mobiles, was as follows:

	Number
1979	14
1983	45
1987	125
1991	236

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently announced £15 million additional capital for the provision of whole-body scanners and other additional medical equipment. This will be the first phase of a three-year rolling programme to expand patient care in this important area.

Hospital Treatment (Patients' Choice)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will take steps to ensure that patients have the right to choose where they will receive hospital treatment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The arrangements which the implementation of the reforms have put in place provide greater flexibility in meeting the needs and wishes of patients and their GPs.

General Practitioners

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of expenditure on primary health care is paid directly to general practitioners and their staff.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is shown in the table.

Primary Care Services	*1989-90*
	£ millions[1]
Hospital and community health services (HCHS):	
General community patient care	581
Community mental illness	154
Community learning disability	77
Total HCHS primary health care	812
Family health services (FCHS):[2]	
Non cash-limited	4,811
Cash-limited[3]	302
Total FHS	5,113
Total primary health care	5,925
Of which general medical services (GMS):[4]	
Non cash-limited	1562
Cash-limited	302
Total GMS	1,569
GMS as a percentage of:	
Total primary health care expenditure	26·5
Total FHS expenditure	30·7

[1]Figures drawn from the programme budget. Disaggregated figures for the HCHS programme are not yet available for 1990-91.
[2]Expenditure on family health services (excluding administration) provided by family doctors, dentists, community pharmacists and opticians.
[3]A proportion of general medical practitioners' expenses, actually cash limited from April 1990.
[4]Includes £750,000 paid direct to British Telecom for priority fault repair services for general medical ractitioners. The balance—less superannuation contributions where appropriate—was paid direct to general medical practioners as fees, allowances and practice expenses, including the costs of employing practice staff.

Incontinence

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the proposed resource centre as recommended in the "Agenda for Action on Continence Services" will be established; what its functions will be; and how good practice in the provision of continence services and supplies will be disseminated to all health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell: We are currently considering a grant application for 1992-93 to set up a "Continence Foundation". The objectives of the foundation would include central co-ordination of information on all continence initiatives and promotion of effective and accessible continence investigation and advisory services throughout the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department intends to take to ensure that increased central purchasing of continence supplies does not lead to a lack of availability of products which are required by a small number of people to meet a particular individual need.

Mr. Dorrell: National purchasing contracts normally cover bulk supply items in common use by health authorities. They are entered into to avoid risks of monopoly supply or premium pricing to the NHS. In all cases they are expected to offer demonstrable benefits to the NHS. Where particular patients require a specified product not available on national contracts, additional arrangements will be made either nationally or locally to ensure supply.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department intends to take to ensure there are improvements in the education and training of all people providing continence services as recommended in the "Agenda for Action on Continence Services".

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has an internal working group on continence services which among other things is considering how the education and training of doctors, nurses and other professional staff can be improved in this field. Appropriate professional bodies are being consulted.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken to implement the recommendations of the "Agenda for Action on Continence Services"; and what measures will be taken to ensure all health authorities undertake implementation.

Mr. Dorrell: In July last year, we sent copies of the "Agenda for Action" to the chairman of all district health authorities, commending the elements of an effective local service identified in it and asking them to review the arrangements for continence services in their districts. Progress in the light of this and further guidance on good practice as it becomes available will be monitored as appropriate by the NHS management executive. A working group has been set up within the Department to take forward the recommendations in the "Agenda for Action" which require central action.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the difficulties associated with the provision of incontinence supplies to women and the drug tariff definition as described in section 12 of the "Agenda for Action on Continence Services"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The arguments for a change in the drug tariff definition have been considered but did not present a convincing case for change at present.

Home Helps

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the changes that have occurred in the total provision of home help services for each local authority in England and Wales over the last five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The readily available information on staffing and expenditure for individual social services departments in England is contained in tables 6, 46, 48 and 50 of the "Profiles of Local Authority Social Services" of which the latest issue covers the period 1984-85 to 1988-89. The annual publication by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, "Personal Social Service Statistics Actuals", of which the latest publication relates to 1989-90, contains information for each local authority on the numbers of clients receiving home care services and the number of hours of service received. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Kidney Patients

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the intake of new patients per million of the population in England in 1990 for kidney treatment.

Mr. Dorrell: According to information provided by the European Dialysis and Transplant Association the number of new patients accepted for renal replacement therapy during 1990 was 59·4 per million population.

Fluoride

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public information campaign is planned by his Department to ensure that children younger than six years of age do not use fluoride mouth rinses.

Mr. Dorrell: Labelling on mouth rinses containing fluoride which are marketed as medicinal products gives advice on their appropriate use. Such advice might not be given on similar mouth rinses which are marketed as cosmetic products. Negotiations are currently being conducted with the Cosmetic, Toiletries and Perfumery Association for such advice to be included on the labels of cosmetic mouth rinses.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what public information campaign his Department is planning to encourage parents to make toothpaste containing 400 parts per million of fluoride available to their children;

(2) what is the maximum level of fluoride concentration permitted in toothpastes sold in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: The Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1989 and the Medicines (Products Other than Veterinary Drugs) (Prescriptions Only) Order 1983 both impose an upper limit of 1,500 parts per million on the concentration of fluoride ion which may be contained in toothpastes on general sale. A toothpaste with a fluoride ion content in excess of 1500 parts per million would be regarded as a medicinal product only available on the prescription of a doctor or a dentist.

The licensing authority provided under the Medicines Act 1968 does not regard a product containing less than 600 parts per million fluoride ion as efficacious in preventing dental caries. We therefore have no plans to encourage parents to make toothpastes containing 400 parts per million of fluoride available to their children.

HIV and AIDS

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of those people in the United Kingdom who received transfusions of blood contaminated with HIV virus are currently alive; how many of them are renal patients; how many have now contracted AIDS; and how many are unemployed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To the end of December 1991, there have been 62 reports in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of HIV infection in people who have received blood or tissue transfer in the United Kingdom. The number of infected persons thought to be alive is 30.

Information is not available centrally on the number who are unemployed, or are renal patients.

The information relating to Scotland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the membership of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards and of its regional committee for Wales; what is their remuneration; what are their occupations; by whom they are appointed; and what are their terms of office.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The membership of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards is given in the table. The membership of the Welsh committee for 1992 has not yet been finalised. The chairman of the advisory committee is paid £23,500 per year, and the vice-chairman £9,249·25 per year. No other members of the committee are paid for their committee work. All members are appointed on behalf of my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland and for Wales.

The chairman is a retired consultant, the vice-chairman is a retired civil servant. With the exception of the chief executive of the NHS management executive, the other members of the committee are consultants in the NHS. The membership is as follows:

Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards
Professor Sir Gordon Robson, CBE, FFARCS (Chairman)
Mr. A. L. Rennie, CB (Vice-Chairman)
Professor Sir Herbert Duthie, MD, FRCS
Sir Anthony Grabham, FRCS
Professor D. K. Peters, FRCP
Mr. J. A. P. Marston, MA, DM, FRCS
Mr. S. C. Simmons, PRCOG
Professor L. G. Whitby, FRSE, PhD, FRCP, FRCPath
Sir Terence English, KBE, PRCS
Professor Dame Margaret Turner-Warwick, DBE, PhD, PRCP
Professor Dame June Lloyd, DBE, MD, FRCP, DCH
Professor M. Rosen, CBE, FFARCS
Dr. J. O. M. C. Craig, FRCS, FRCR, DMRD
Mr. D. K. Nichol, CBE
Dr. F. Moran, FRCP
Professor P. Lachmann, FRS, ScD, PhD, FRCP, PRCPath
Mr. D. Seel, BDS, FDS, RCS, MOrth
Professor W. W. Holland, MD, FRCP, PFPHM

Dr. Vera Dallos, FRCP
Dr. J. R. Bennett, FRCP
Professor D. C. Carter, MD, FRCS
Mr. A. W. F. Lettin, MS, FRCS
Professor J. D. Swales, MD, FRCP
Professor A. C. P. Sims, PRCPsych

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Government intend to implement the recommendations on toxoplasmosis of the Fourth Report of the Health Committee, session 1990-91, on maternity services: "Pre-conceptual Care."

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This recommendation is currently being considered by the Government, along with other recommendations contained in the preconception care report of the Health Select Committee maternity services inquiry (Session 1990-91: HC 430-I). A full response to the report will be published shortly.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on toxoplasmosis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In the last 12 months the Department has received four inquiries from the general public and 32 inquiries from right hon. and hon. Members, three of which were parliamentary questions.

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the European countries which test for toxoplasmosis during pregnancy *(a)* routinely and *(b)* on request; for each European country what are the rates of pre-pregnancy immunity and sero-conversion during pregnancy; and which countries provide health education to pregnant women on the avoidance of toxoplasmosis infection during pregnancy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are aware that France, Austria and parts of Germany conduct screening for toxoplasmosis in pregnant women. No other information is available.

NHS Number Identity System

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate has been made of the expenditure incurred by the national health service as a result of not applying the national health service number identity system; and if he will make a statement.

NHS Cards

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps doctors take to ensure that the person named on the national health service number card is the patient sitting before them; and what his Department is doing to prevent possible fraudulent visits occuring;

(2) if he will make a statement on the reasons patients are not usually required to show their national health service number card when visiting doctors and dentists; and if he will take steps to ensure that the rule requiring the card to be shown is more vigorously enforced.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An NHS medical card is issued only when a patient has been accepted on to a GP's list. It is not normally considered necessary for a patient to produce a card in order to obtain treatment on subsequent occasions since family doctors and dentists normally know their patients and have the patients' records to hand. There are separate well-established arrangments for dealing with temporary residents. GPs and dentists are required to provide any treatment which they consider to be immediately necessary without regard to the nationality of the patient concerned.

GPs and dentists are also advised of the relevant reciprocal health care agreements and are directed to offer private treatment if it appears that a patient has come to the United Kingdom specifically for medical care. In a case of uncertainty the GP can ask to see the patient's NHS card. He can then decide whether to accept someone as a NHS patient or on a private fee-paying basis.

We have no evidence available concerning any extra costs to general practice resulting from these arrangements.

NHS (Overseas Visitors)

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that overseas visitors do not abuse the national health service free treatment system.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Treatment in a national health service hospital's accident and emergency department is free to anyone who needs it. Eligibility for free non-emergency hospital treatment is based on residence in the United Kingdom—not on nationality or the payment of taxes. Anyone not ordinarily resident in the UK has to pay for such treatment unless covered by one of a number of specified exemptions.

Guidance issued to hospitals by the Department of Health makes it clear that, where there is doubt about eligibility, hospital staff should ask for corroborative evidence or take a refundable deposit in advance. I have asked the NHS management executive to investigate the particular cases raised recently in the press and to write to NHS managers to remind them of the need to apply the existing guidelines. The management executive will follow up with regions to ensure that this instruction is being implemented. We will then re-issue the guidelines taking into account any further findings by the management executive.

Community Care

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a statement about the transfer of resources to local authorities to implement the new community care legislation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The transfer from the Department of Social Security to local authorities will be determined during the 1992 public expenditure round and will be announced in that context.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. Dorrell: The amount of £2 million has been spent on the production and distribution of the patients charter. There has been an unprecedented level of demand for the charter. Over 900,000 requests from members of the

general public for the charter have been received to date and more are still being received. This is a clear demonstration of the success of the patients charter.

NHS Hospitals

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the cleanliness of national health service hospitals since cleaning services were privatised.

Mr. Dorrell: A key objective for NHS management is to maintain an environment which promotes and protects the health of all who come into contact with hospital services.

The responsibility for specifying the required standards of cleanliness and ensuring those standards are maintained rests with local hospital management whether cleaning services are provided in-house or by external contractor.

Patient Registration

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from *(a)* the British Medical Association, *(b)* the Royal College of General Practitioners and *(c)* other organisations about the new patient registration examination; and whether he has any plans to dispense with the requirement for the examination when patients are reallocated within a group practice following the resignation of a partner.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No such representations have been received. We believe it is beneficial for both patient and doctor that there should be an opportunity for the doctor to obtain an up to date profile of any new patient joining his list. There is already provision for the requirement to be waived when a patient has participated in such a consultation with a partner during the preceding 12 months.

Bulgaria

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to increase the amount of medical assistance to Bulgaria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The United Kingdom signed last November a health co-operation agreement with the Republic of Bulgaria. This provides for exchanges of information and experts in the field of medicine and public health. The areas of co-operation will include health service organisation and management of health economics, health promotion and disease prevention and maternal and child health.

In addition, the United Kingdom has contributed in the normal way to the cost of the EC Poland and Hungary assistance for economic restructuring programme for Bulgaria amounting to £85·7 million, a proportion of which has included help with the development of health services.

Disability

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshaw, 13 January, *Official Report*, column *522*, if his Department has made any assessment of the device known as Link; if he has any plans to make the new aid available to hearing-impaired people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has not made any assessment of the device known as Link and has no plans to do so. Provision of equipment of this kind to people who might benefit from its use can be made, according to assessment of need and subject to availability of resources, through local health, education or social services authorities.

Child Care

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision, under the terms of the Children Act 1989, is to be provided for under-eight-year-old children in Liverpool, particularly those in need of after-school care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is collected annually about registered childminders and day care provision which is published by the Department of Health in the "Children's Day Care" series. The most recent document "Children's Day Care Facilities at 31 March 1991 England—Provisional Feedback" is available in the Library. Arrangements have been set in hand for the 31 March 1992 returns to include data about registered after school provision for school age children aged under eight.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent in each of the last five years on compensation for *(a)* private home owners, *(b)* businesses and *(c)* personal injury as a result of terrorist activity.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is set out in the table:

Criminal damage and injuries compensation paid as a result of terrorist activity

Financial year	*Private Property £K*	*Businesses £K*	*Criminal Injuries £K*
1988-89 (From 6.8.88)	1,765	10,001	3,466
1989-90	3,334	14,834	6,489
1990-91	4,259	14,497	7,965
1991-92 (to 31.12.91)	2,863	15,754	7,314

1. Amounts exclude costs incurred by applicants in formulating their claims.
2. Private property includes property which is owned or rented.
3. Compensation for private property includes payment for damage to buildings, vehicles and personal effects.

Police Stations

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been spent in each of the last five years on *(a)* the building and *(b)* the upgrading of police stations in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. The total amount spent by the police authority for Northern Ireland on the police building programme, including the building and upgrading of police stations, in each of the last five years is:

Year	Major new works £K	Minor new works £K	Maintenance £K
1986-87	6,133	1,626	3,924
1987-88	16,082	2,146	3,919
1988-89	16,739	2,184	3,553
1989-90	19,377	1,624	3,262
1990-91	20,774	2,733	4,134

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent in each of the last five years on repair or replacement of police stations destroyed as a result of terrorist activity.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is:

Year	£
1986-87	588,600
1987-88	137,500
1988-89	660,837
1989-90	1,129,250
1990-91	517,873

Gaelic Athletic Association

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been paid out in grant aid to the Gaelic Athletic Association in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mawhinney: Grants paid to the Gaelic Athletic Association and its affiliated clubs in each of the last five years were as follows:

Financial Year	Department of Education Capital Grant to Affiliated GAA Clubs £	Sports Council for Northern Ireland Club/Equipment Grants £	Sports Council for Northern Ireland Administration Coaching Grants £
1986-87	59,642	6,428	13,979
1987-88	48,650	4,600	21,966
1988-89	35,337	4,467	18,995
1989-90	53,928	6,974	22,433
1990-91	1,273	5,848	29,373

Schools

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been made available for capital spending to schools in *(a)* the controlled sector, *(b)* the maintained sector, *(c)* the voluntary sector and *(d)* classed as integrated in each of the education and library board areas in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

	Financial Year	Belfast £	Board Area and Expenditure £000's Western £	N-Eastern £	S-Eastern £	Southern £
Controlled	1986-87	1,001	910	1,921	3,031	2,333
	1987-88	1,075	588	1,805	3,003	1,947
	1988-89	2,482	1,303	1,791	3,048	2,919
	1989-90	2,006	2,305	3,785	3,931	3,565
	1990-91	2,370	3,442	6,372	5,619	3,886
Maintained	1986-87	1,464	1,165	688	755	425
	1987-88	1,524	896	1,881	275	597
	1988-89	2,405	2,165	2,391	1,105	2,522
	1989-90	2,559	2,462	1,456	1,127	3,877
	1990-91	4,106	3,042	1,255	2,186	6,818
Voluntary	1986-87	285	355	573	502	667
	1987-88	881	243	994	305	848
	1988-89	1,368	864	2,073	509	1,972
	1989-90	1,425	1,208	1,848	1,783	3,309
	1990-91	1,602	2,034	2,575	1,375	2,923
Integrated	1986-87	—	—	—	—	—
	1987-88	—	—	—	616	—
	1988-89	—	—	—	2	—
	1989-90	116	—	—	577	186
	1990-91	820	—	650	1,469	35

Note:

i. These are actual expenditure figures and represent grants paid in respect of controlled schools at 100 per cent., maintained and voluntary schools almost entirely at 85 per cent. and integrated schools at 85 per cent. up until 12/11/90 and at 100 per cent. since that date.

ii. The figures represent capital expenditure at primary, secondary and grammar schools.

iii. A breakdown of expenditure on furniture and equipment is not available for years 1986-87 and 1987-88 but costs are included in subsequent years.

Ulster Museum

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1991 reported by the Ulster museum, including its outstations, with the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1990.

Dr. Mawhinney: In 1991 a total of 317,600 people visited the Ulster museum and the Armagh county museum—an increase of 7·3 per cent. on the attendance figure for 1990.

TRANSPORT

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects work to start on the construction of the east London river crossing.

Mr. Chope: Main construction works are planned to start in spring 1993. Some advance diversion of statutory undertakers services is planned to start earlier.

Mr. Cartwright To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what legal action has been initiated against his Department as a result of the publication of compulsory purchase notices in connection with the construction of the east London river crossing.

Mr. Chope: Notices of motion have been served in the High Court by the London borough of Greenwich and by nine local residents in respect of the compulsory purchase orders and an exchange land certificate for the east London river crossing.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. McLoughlin: Less than £3,000.

Tilbury and Southend Railway Line

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to reply to the proposals from British Rail for the modernisation of the London, Tilbury and Southend line.

Mr. Freeman: BR will shortly go out to tender for the design of the £50 million re-signalling scheme. This should improve reliability on this route significantly. Discussions on the rolling stock proposals are continuing and we hope to reach a conclusion shortly.

BR Slam-shut Doors

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the publication date of the Health and Safety Executive's report into British Rail slam-shut doors; and for what reason the report was not published on the date originally expected.

Mr. Freeman: Most of the technical work on this very detailed and complex investigation has now been completed and work is in hand on the preparation of the report. The Health and Safety Executive attaches the utmost importance to producing a report which is comprehensive, and contains practicable recommendations. I understand that the present estimate is that publication will be possible in the spring.

Leith Docks

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received recent representations from the Forth ports authority about the privatisation of Leith docks, including a management buy-out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: On 8 January the Forth ports authority submitted under the provisions of section 9 of the Ports Act 1991 for confirmation by my right hon. and learned Friend a scheme for the transfer of their undertaking to a successor company formed under section 1 of the Act. The authority has announced its intention to sell its undertaking by means of a flotation, and I understand that it intends that the flotation should include provision for a substantial shareholding by management and employers.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I very much welcome this decision by the largest trust port in Scotland to seek privatisation under the Ports Act.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of the financial implications of the proposed coastguard review with regard to disposal of assets.

Mr. McLoughlin: Due to the terms on which they are held, no significant income is expected from the disposal of property by Her Majesty's Coastguard as a result of this review. However, annual running cost savings of over £50,000 will be achieved once the programme of disposals is complete.

A capital investment of £864,000 will also be made over the same period in the improvement of existing facilities and the construction of new stations.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what liaison he had with the coastguard union leaders during the recent review of the coastguard service.

Mr. McLoughlin: Coastguard union leaders were kept informed at all stages during the recent review of the sector and auxiliary coastguard organisation.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial savings are expected from the proposed cuts to the coastguard service in Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin: The recently completed review of Her Majesty's Coastguard's sector and auxiliary coastguard organisation was not a cost-cutting exercise, but was undertaken with the aim of ensuring that Her Majesty's Coastguard continues to provide the best possible service in an effective and efficient manner. The provisional financial savings, after full implementation of the sector review in Scotland are £268,000.

Radioactive Materials Transport Division

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the actual staffing level of the radioactive materials transport division in each year since its formation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Radioactive materials transport division, Department of Transport:

Year	*Complement*	*Actual staffing level*
1979	12	12
1980	12	12
1981	14	14
1982	15	15
1983	15	15
1984	16	16
1985	15	15
1986	15	15
1987	16	15
1988	16	16
1989	16	16
1990	17	17
1991	17	17

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the cuts proposed in the recently published consultation paper on the review of the coastguard service are due to be finalised; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: An implementation plan for each region was prepared and submitted to coastguard headquarters by the regional controller, which covered a four year period of implementation beginning in the financial year 1991-92, once the recommendations and proposals made in the review had been granted ministerial approval.

The implementation of the review's recommendations will ensure that Her Majesty's Coastguard continues to provide the best possible search and rescue service, in an efficient and cost-effective manner, into the future, in the way outlined in my announcement to the House on 3 December 1991.

Marchioness Inquiry

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his written answer of 13 January on the second Marchioness inquiry, *Official Report*, column *504*, he will add to the list of accidents on the River Thames to which he has drawn to the attention of Mr Hayes and his adviser the following: *(a)* collision between Bowbelle and MV Catford, at East Greenwich, 23 January 1965, *(b)* collision between Bowbelle and SS De Baif, at Dagenham, 11 November 1965, *(c)* collision between Bowbelle and Bertonia, at Halfway Reach, 16 January 1967, *(d)* collision between Bowbelle and Jo Tor, River Thames, 26 April 1967, *(e)* collision between Bowbelle and MV Bradfield, at Gravesend, 13 January 1971, *(f)* Bowbelle collision with Cannon Street railway bridge, 26 May 1982 and *(g)* collision between Bowbelle and Bowsprite, Upper Pool, 5 November 1987.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall be pleased to draw these incidents to the attention of Mr. Hayes.

Burscough Curves Rail Extension

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consultations there have been between his Department and British Rail on whether to restore the Burscough Curves rail extension to Southport;

(2) if he will consider plans to re-open the Burscough Curves rail extension to Southport.

Mr. Freeman: There have been no consultations with British Rail on this matter as any decision to re-open the curves would be entirely a matter for BR.

Airline Passengers

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what plans he has to provide protection to scheduled airline passengers who have paid fares in advance in the event of their airline going out of business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. and learned Friend asked the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority in March 1991 for advice on whether some arrangements could be introduced to help protect scheduled passengers against financial loss and disruption arising from the failure of an airline.

The advice from the CAA was published in August as CAP595. It recommended that if there were to be a protection scheme the most desirable option would be to establish a common fund, financed by a levy charged to all airlines, including foreign ones, which had passengers to, from, or within the United Kingdom. The fund would be designed to compensate such passengers for loss in the event of airline failure. It is likely that primary legislation would be needed to impose a levy.

My Department is now carefully studying the legal and other implications of the CAA's preferred scheme. In addition, my Department is exploring other options considered by the CAA, such as compulsory insurance by airlines.

Lighthouse Service

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been paid in each of the last five financial years by Her Majesty's Government from the General Lighthouse Fund to the Irish Government to subsidise that country's lighthouse service; if he will state how long this system of payments has been in existence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: No money is paid to the Irish Government from the General Lighthouse Fund. The lights and buoys in the Irish Republic form part of a common British Isles system of navigational aids managed by the three general lighthouse authorities (GLA) which are financed from the fund. The fund derives its income from light dues levied at ports in Britain and Ireland.

The Commissioners of Irish Lights (CIL) are the GLA for the whole of Ireland. Under a 1985 agreement with the Irish Government, broadly half the costs deemed to be incurred by CIL in the Republic are—following a transitional period—now met by an annual contribution from the Irish Government and by light dues collected at ports in the Republic of Ireland. The balance of those costs are met by the fund.

Over the last five years, light dues collected in the Republic of Ireland and the Irish Government contribution were:

	Light dues	IR £ million Irish Government contribution
1986-87	1·9	1·3
1987-88	2·2	1·4
1988-89	2·5	2·0
1989-90	2·6	2·3
1990-91	2·7	2·4

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the level of unemployment for each year since 1962.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested is available on the consistent seasonally adjusted basis only from 1971. It can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number and percentage of the work force in Heywood and Middleton currently in part-time work.

Mr. Jackson: The lastest available information about employment in parliamentary constituencies is from the September 1989 census of employment and relates to employees in employment only.

At September 1989, there were an estimated 5,200 employees in part-time employment in the Heywood and Middleton constituency. This represented 22 per cent. of all employees in employment in the area at that time.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department has so far produced two charters, the jobseekers charter and the redundancy payments service charter. The total cost of producing and distributing information and display materials to support the introduction of the jobseekers charter throughout the network of 1,400 local offices has been £606,000. The total cost of producing and distributing the redundancy payments service charter leaflet was £23,000.

Euratom Directive

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with the trades union representatives of the emergency services regarding implementation of the EC Euratom directive 89/618; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Commission considered and approved for publication a consultative document (CD37) containing proposals for regulations to implement the directive. The document was published on 28 November 1991 and a copy is held in the Library.

Copies of the consultative document have been sent to a wide range of interested parties including the Trades Union Congress, local authority associations, employer organisations and organisations representing workers in the emergency services to gain their views on the proposals.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the areas which will receive information under the provisions of the EC Euratom directive 89/618.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) is currently conducting public consultation on proposals to implement European Council directive 89/618/ Euratom. A copy of this consultative document (CD37) is in the Library. It is not yet possible to list the areas which will receive information as it may be necessary to amend the proposals in the light of the results of consultation within the United Kingdom and with the Commission of the European Communities.

Under the HSC's current proposals a duty will be placed on every employer to assess whether he is carrying on work from which a radiation emergency—as defined by the directive—is reasonably foreseeable. Where a radiation emergency is reasonably foreseeable, it is for the Health and Safety Executive to determine the area within which the employers must distribute the required information.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken and intends to take to implement the provisions of the EC Euratom directive 89/618 as regards transport of nuclear material; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer given in reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) January 1992, *Official Report* column *457*, as the implementation proposals put forward by the Health and Safety Commission cover this area of activity.

Commercial Debtors

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will seek powers to require commercial debtors to settle outstanding accounts within the agreed terms of the credit account concerned or to pay interest on the sums outstanding.

Mr. Forth: I have no plans to seek powers to impose interest charges on outstanding commercial debts. I am aware that late payment of debt is a problem, particularly for the small firms sector. The evidence that statutory interest would improve payment practices is, however, far from conclusive and I remain to be convinced that a legislative approach would be both effective and administratively practical.

I am, nevertheless, keeping the matter under close review and I am interested to see views on how an effective and practical legislative framework might operate.

SCOTLAND

Community Charge

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the average domestic rates bill in each local authority in Scotland which would be necessary to yield the same revenue as his estimate of the yield of the community charge in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Allan Stewart: In the absence of up-to-date information on the number of domestic rateable subjects it is not possible to answer this question precisely. The table below is based on provisional outturn information from local authorities on the yield of the community charge in 1990-91 and figures on the budgeted yield in 1991-92, adjusted for the amounts of community charge grant due to be received and for selective action, together with details of the number of domestic subjects at 1 April 1988.

Average rates yield per domestic subject to give same income as community charge in:

	1990-91 (provisional outturn) £	*1991-92 (budget estimate)* £
District Councils		
Berwickshire	341·12	218·08
Ettrick & Lauderdale	357·91	242·10
Roxburgh	361·58	236·12
Tweeddale	360·39	230·04
Clackmannan	577·63	472·89
Falkirk	467·37	356·71
Stirling	591·51	466·63
Annandale & Eskdale	434·17	304·90
Nithsdale	420·91	302·77
Stewartry	399·99	268·73
Wigtown	402·36	290·35
Dunfermline	545·96	428·56
Kirkcaldy	552·51	426·53
North East Fife	569·19	440·19
Aberdeen City	438·20	362·06
Banff & Buchan	398·48	290·25
Gordon	372·38	263·99
Kincardine & Deeside	339·85	229·45
Moray	364·58	249·53
Badenoch & Strathspey	389·68	252·09
Caithness	382·92	242·68
Inverness	381·78	243·06
Lochaber	417·53	294·79
Nairn	384·56	248·26
Ross & Cromarty	415·85	289·44
Skye & Lochalsh	379·36	256·00
Sutherland	361·57	261·38
East Lothian	645·71	530·96
Edinburgh City	694·83	587·92
Midlothian	635·09	518·20
West Lothian	628·85	479·70
Argyll & Bute	501·63	394·05
Bearsden & Milngavie	519·54	390·29
Clydebank	535·67	445·91
Clydesdale	524·53	411·18
Cumbernauld & Kilsyth	486·10	357·07
Cumnock & Doon Valley	484·86	360·05
Cunninghame	493·95	422·87
Dumbarton	559·03	485·68
East Kilbride	570·97	451·34
Eastwood	458·88	323·98
Glasgow City	495·80	422·07
Hamilton	515·74	419·98
Inverclyde	501·73	385·01
Kilmarnock & Loudoun	472·09	373·19
Kyle & Carrick	534·62	445·88
Monklands	538·90	426·83
Motherwell	499·40	380·43
Renfrew	536·63	433·82
Strathkelvin	543·33	431·61
Angus	446·80	349·60
Dundee City	482·80	416·15
Perth & Kinross	452·13	362·19
Island Councils		
Orkney	234·95	3·52
Shetland	160·64	1·74
Western Isles	268·52	42·69

Kidney Patients

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the intake of new patients per million of the population in Scotland in 1990 for kidney treatment.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The intake of new patients for treatment of chronic renal failure in Scotland was 61·3 per million of population as at 31 December 1990.

Open University

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what relationship his Department has had with the Open university, and in particular with regard to its activities in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department has cordial and constructive relations with the Open university. My officials have met senior university staff in Scotland on a number of occasions to discuss aspects of the Government's White Paper "Higher Education—A New Framework" and current legislative proposals as they would affect the university's operations in Scotland.

Organ Donor Cards

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent initiatives his Department has taken to promote the carrying of organ transplant donor cards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Department maintains a continuous campaign to promote the carrying of organ transplant donor cards. Recently a full-page advertisement in the magazine of a leading Scottish Sunday newspaper encouraged the carrying of cards. Some 100,000 cards are distributed annually, free of charge, to a wide variety of outlets throughout Scotland.

I am confident that the opening of the heart/lung transplant unit in Glasgow and my recent announcement about the establishment of a liver transplant unit in Scotland will alert more Scottish people to the benefits of transplantation, and thus provide an impetus to the donor campaign.

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Faulds: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the attendance figures for 1991 reported by the national museums and galleries in Scotland, broken down into the individual institutions but including their outstations, with the figures in each case of the percentage increase or decrease on the attendance figures for 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

	1991	Percentage change since 1990
National galleries of Scotland	690,124	−14·67
National museums of Scotland	1,070,833	+6·89

The national galleries of Scotland comprise the national gallery of Scotland, the Scottish national gallery of modern art and the Scottish national portrait gallery. The national museums of Scotland comprise the royal museum of Scotland buildings at Chambers street and Queen street, Edinburgh, the Scottish agricultural museum, the Scottish united services museum, the museum of flight and the Shambellie museum of costume.

Sheriffs

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to appoint full-time sheriffs in 1992 and future years; to which sheriffdoms such appointments will be made; whether he will seek to appoint more women as sheriffs; and whether he will seek to appoint more solicitors as sheriffs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number and location of new appointments in 1992 and future years will reflect a number of considerations including the incidence of retirals which cannot be accurately predicted and the judicial resources required to allow courts to deal timeously with the volume of cases coming before them. Application of the present policy whereby in respect of each vacancy the best-fitted candidate is appointed has resulted in more solicitors being appointed in recent years and can be expected to result in more women being appointed in the future as a greater number of women lawyers of appropriate ability acquire the experience necessary for a shrieval appointment.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average annual total number of working days for a full-time sheriff in the last year for which figures are available; what is the gross salary of a sheriff and a sheriff principal; and what is the daily remuneration presently paid to a temporary sheriff.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of working days per annum for a full-time sheriff, excluding duties during weekends and public holidays, is 216. At 1 January 1992, the gross annual salaries of a sheriff and sheriff principal were, respectively, £59,900 and £66,500. The present daily remuneration rate of a temporary sheriff is £223.

Hill Livestock Payments

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to issue claims forms for hill livestock compensatory allowance payments.

Mr. Lang: Application forms for the 1992 HLCA scheme were issued to producers on 13 January.

EC Drinking Water Directive

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the water supply zones which do not fully comply with requirements of the EC drinking water directive, stating for each the reasons for non-compliance; what region each supply zone falls within; and if he will give the expected date of compliance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The Water Supply (Water Quality) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 incorporate the requirements of the EC drinking water directive. Details of water quality in individual supply zones are available in public registers maintained by water authorities. Results for the first six months' monitoring show 97 per cent. of samples meeting the standards. The public water supply zones where quality does not fully comply with the regulations are listed in the table below, which also shows the parameters concerned and the expected compliance date in each case.

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Borders		
Ale	Aluminium	1998
Cockburnspath	Iron	2005
Earnscleugh	Aluminium	1995
Galaschiels	Aluminium	1992
Tweedsmuir	Bact[1]	1994
Watch	Iron	2005
West Linton	Trihalomethanes	1993
Central		
Alloa	Aluminium, Lead	1997
Ardeonaig	Trihalomethanes	1995
Balquhidder	Trihalomethanes	1995
Bo'ness, Blackness Whitecross	Trihalomethanes	1998
Bonnybridge, Camelon, High Bonnybridge	Aluminium	1990
Bridge of Allan	Aluminium	1995
Cowie, Plean, Airth Stirling (Part)	Aluminium	1992
Cumbernauld	Trihalomethanes	1998
Falkirk, Larbert, Carron Stenhousemuir, Skinflats	Aluminium	1997
Kirkintilloch (part), Lenzie	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1998
Kirkintilloch-Waterside	Trihalomethanes	1998
Lennoxtown, Milton of Campsie Torrance, Balmore	Trihalomethanes	1998
Dumfries & Galloway		
Areeming (Lochenkit) North	Iron, pH, Colour, Manganese	1992
	Aluminium, Bact[1]	

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Arecming (Lockenkit) South	Iron, pH, Colour, Manganese Aluminium, Bact[1]	1992
Auchnneel	Aluminium, pH, Trihalomethanes	1995
Black Esk	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Carsphairn	Bact[1]	1992
Castle Douglas	Trihalomethanes	1992
Creetown	Trihalomethanes	1992
Euchan	Aluminium, pH, Bact[1] Trihalomethanes	1995
Glengap	Trihalomethanes	1992
Glengap/Ringford Borehole	Trihalomethanes	1992
Killylour	Aluminium	1994
Killylour/Terregles Borehole	Aluminium	1994
Lochfoot	pH, Aluminium	1995
Lochinvar	Trihalomethanes	1992
New Abbey	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1995
Newton Stewart	Trihalomethanes	1992
Palnure	pH, Trihalomethanes, Bact[1]	1992
Penwhirn	pH, Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1995
Sanquhar	Trihalomethanes	1992
Winterhope	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Fife		
Auchterderran	Iron	2008
Buckhaven	Iron	2018
Cleish	Iron	2002
Cowdenbeath	Iron	2001
Dunfermline	Iron	1999
Dunfermline South	Iron	1995
East Neuk	Iron	2003
Falkland	Iron	2017
Fordell	Iron	2007
Glenrothes North	Iron	2014
Glenrothes South	Iron	2017
Kinross	Iron	2017
Kirkcaldy	Iron	2013
Newburgh	Iron	2019
North East Fife	Iron	2007
North Fife	Iron	2003
St. Andrews/Pipeland	Iron	2019
Tayport	Iron	2020
Grampian		
Auchengoul	Iron	2010
Buckie	Iron, Aluminium	2010
Cairnbulg	Iron	2010
Forehill (Except Peterhead)	Trihalomethanes	1994
Fraserburgh (Bogensourie)	Aluminium	1993
Fraserburgh/Hillhead	Iron	2010
Glendye	Aluminium	1996
Glenlatterach	Aluminium	1994
Keith (Herricks)	Aluminium	1994
Kennethmont	Iron	2010
Largie (Insch)	Iron	2010
Lossiemouth (High Level)	Aluminium	1994
Peterhead-Forehill	Trihalomethanes	1994
Highland		
Achaphubuil	Bact[1]	1997
Acharacle	Bact[1]	1994
Achiltibuie	Iron, Colour, Aluminium Turbidity, Manganese, Bact[1]	1997
Achmelvich	Bact[1]	1995
Achmore	Bact[1]	1995
Achnasheen	Bact[1]	1995
Aird of Sleat	Bact[1]	1997
Altnaharra	Bact[1]	1997
Applecross	Bact[1]	1995
Ardgour	Bact[1]	1995
Ardneaskin	Bact[1]	1997
Ardvasar/Daraich	Bact[1]	1997
Ardvasar/Uisdein	Bact[1]	1997
Armadale	Bact[1]	1997
Arnisdale	Bact[1]	1997
Aultbea	Bact[1]	1994
Badachro	Bact[1]	1994
Badcaul/Dundonnel	Bact[1]	1994

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Ballaculish (South)	Bact[1]	1992
Balmacara	Bact[1]	1994
Balnain/Bearnock	Bact[1]	1995
Beasdale	Bact[1]	1997
Bettyhill/Meadie	Bact[1]	1995
Bettyhill/Mor	Bact[1]	1997
Blaich	Bact[1]	1995
Bohuntin	Bact[1]	1997
Bonar Bridge/Ardgay	Iron, pH, Aluminium, Colour, Turbidity, Bact[1]	1996
Bracadale	Iron, Colour, Bact[1]	1995
Braes	Bact[1]	1995
Caithness except Wick	Iron, Aluminium, Manganese	1996
Cannich	Bact[1]	1995
Carbost	Bact[1]	1995
Carnoch/Glencoe	Bact[1]	1994
Corpach	Iron, Colour, Manganese	1998
Corpach/Caol/Loy	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, pH, Turbidity, Manganese	1998
Culrain	Aluminium, Bact[1] Colour, Iron, pH, Manganese	1997
Diabeg	Bact[1]	1997
Dores	Bact[1]	1997
Dornie	Bact[1]	1994
Dornoch	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1996
Drimnin	Bact[1]	1997
Drumbeg	Bact[1]	1997
Drumfearn	Bact[1]	1997
Durness	Bact[1], Turbidity	1995
Easter Ross and Black Isle/Assynt	Aluminium, Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1994
Elgol	Bact[1]	1997
Elphin	Bact[1]	1995
Fassfearn	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese	1997
Ferness	Bact[1]	1997
Fort Augustus	Bact[1]	1994
Fort William	Colour, Iron	1998
Foyers	Bact[1]	1994
Gairloch	Bact	1992
Garve	Aluminium, Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1995
Glenachulish	Bact[1]	1994
Glendale	Bact[1]	1995
Glenelg	Bact[1]	1995
Glenfinnan	Bact[1]	1995
Glenuig	Bact	1997
Glenurquhart/Allt Coilte	Bact[1]	1994
Glenurquhart/Nam Bat	Turbidity	1998
Golspie, Brora	Aluminium, Colour, Turbidity	1996
Gorthleck	Bact[1]	1994
Grantown on Spey (Dreggie)	Colour, Iron, pH, Turbidity	1995
Harrapool/Broadford	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese	1994
Helmsdale Ord	Bact[1]	1992
Helmsdale/Caen	Bact[1]	1992
Inveralligin	Bact[1]	1997
Inverasdale	Bact[1]	1995
Invergarry	Bact[1]	1994
Inverinate	Bact[1]	1997
Inverinate (Forestry)	Bact[1]	1997
Invermoriston Ness	Bact[1]	1995
Inverness/Balmore	Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1998
Inverness/Oldtown	Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1998
Isle Ornsay	Bact[1]	1995
Kentallen	Turbidity	1992
Kilchoan	Bact[1]	1994
Kilmaluag	Bact[1]	1997
Kilmuir	Bact[1]	1994
Kingussie	Bact[1]	1994
Kinlochewe	Bact[1]	1995
Kinlochleven	Bact[1]	1992
Kishorn	Bact[1]	1997
Kyleakin	Bact[1], Turbidity	1995
Kylesku	Bact[1]	1997
Laggan Bridge	Bact[1]	1997
Laid	Bact[1]	1997
Laide	Bact[1]	1995

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Lairg	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1992
Letterfearn	Bact[1]	1997
Lochaline	Bact[1]	1994
Lochend	Bact[1]	1997
Lochinver	Bact[1]	1992
Loth, Portgower	Bact[1]	1997
Mellon Udrigle	Bact[1]	1997
Melness	Bact[1]	1995
Melvich, Strathy	Bact[1]	1994
Nairn	Aluminium, Colour, Turbidity	1995
Nedd	Bact[1]	1997
North Erradale	Bact[1]	1997
Onich	Bact[1]	1992
Oykel Bridge	Bact[1]	1997
Penifiler	Bact[1]	1997
Pooleve	Bact[1]	1995
Raasay	Bact[1]	1995
Ratagan	Bact[1]	1997
Rogart Muidhe	Bact[1]	1995
Rogart Upper	Bact[1]	1994
Roschall/Invercassley	Bact[1], Colour, Iron, Manganese, Turbidity	1997
Rosemarkie	Bact[1]	1994
Roskhill, Dunvegan	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1992
Roybridge	Bact[1]	1995
Salen	Bact[1]	1997
Sallachy	Bact[1]	1997
Sconser	Bact[1]	1997
Scourie	Bact[1]	1994
Shiel Bridge	Bact[1]	1997
Shieldaig	Bact[1]	1997
Skerray	Bact[1]	1997
Spean Bridge	Bact[1]	1994
Stoer	Bact[1]	1994
Strath Halladale	Bact[1]	1997
Strath Naver	Bact[1]	1997
Strathcarron	Bact[1]	1997
Strathnairn	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, Manganese	1994
Strollamus	Bact[1]	1997
Strontian	Bact[1]	1994
Tarscavaig	Bact[1]	1997
Teangue	Bact[1]	1997
Tomich	Bact[1]	1997
Tongue	Bact[1]	1994
Torridon	Bact[1]	1997
Torrin	Bact[1]	1997
Trislaig	Bact[1]	1997
Uig/Glenuig/Earlish	Bact[1]	1994
Uig/Idrigill	Bact[1]	1997
Waternish	Bact[1]	1995
Waterstein	Bact[1]	1997
Wick	Aluminium, Colour, Iron, Nitrite, Manganese, Turbidity	1996
Lothian		
Alnwickhill Joppa	Bact[1], pH	1992
Alnwickhill, Leith	Bact[1], pH	1992
Alnwickhill, Newington	Bact[1], pH	1992
Alnwickhill, Portobello	Bact[1], pH	1992
Balgreen	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Castlehill	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Chalkieside	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Deans	Aluminium, Bact[1], Trihalomethanes	1998
Dechmont	Trihalomethanes	1998
Dechmont Law	Aluminium, Bact[1], Trihalomethanes	1998
East Craigs	Trihalomethanes	1998
Fairmilehead Direct	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Fairmilehead Gilmerton	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill Mid	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill North	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill South	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Firhill West	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Fountainhall	Aluminium, Bact[1], pH	1995
Garleton	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Harburnhead	Bact[1]	1993
Harlaw/Marchbank	Bact[1]	1993

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Hillend	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1997
Hopes	Aluminium	1995
Kingslaw	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Kinleith	Bact[1]	1993
Latch	Bact[1]	1993
Pateshill Direct	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Pateshill District	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Pateshill Longridge	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Preston	Trihalomethanes	1998
Stobshiel	Aluminium, pH	1995
Torduff	Bact[1], pH	1993
Traprain	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1995
Waterston	Aluminium, Bact[1], Trihalomethanes	1998
West Mains	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Whittinghame	Aluminium, Bact[1]	1994
Orkney		
Mainland North & West	Aluminium	1997
Mainland South & East	Aluminium	1994
Mainland, Kirkwall	Aluminium	1996
Sanday	Aluminium	1995
Westray	Aluminium	1994
Shetland		
Aith	Aluminium	1995
Burra Isle	Aluminium	1993
Gulberwick & Quarff	Aluminium	1995
Reawick and Skeld	Aluminium	1997
Sandness	Aluminium	1996
Sandwick	Manganese	1994
South Yell	Aluminium	1992
Walls	Aluminium	1996
Whalsay	Aluminium	1996
Strathclyde		
Airdrie (South), Calderbank, Coatbridge (South)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Alexandria, Bonhill, Renton, Balloch (Leven Valley)	Trihalomethanes	1999
Ardeer	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Ardrishaig, Lochgilphead	Aluminium, Lead	1995
Ardrossan & Environs	Aluminium	1992
Ayr	Aluminium	1993
Baillieston	Trihalomethanes	1998
Bearsden, Faifley, Yoker, Clydebank	Aluminium	1996
Bellshill, Mossend & Holytown	Trihalomethanes	1998
Blackwaterfoot, Shiskine, Machrie	Trihalomethanes	2002
Bowling, Bonhill, Old Kilpatrick	Trihalomethanes	1998
Bowmore, Port Ellen (Islay)	Aluminium	1993
Brodick	Trihalomethanes	2000
Caldercruix & Plains	Trihalomethanes	1998
Campbeltown	Aluminium	1994
Carradale	Aluminium	1992
Catacol	Trihalomethanes	1997
Clachan	Aluminium	1994
Coatbridge	Trihalomethanes	1998
Craighouse (Jura)	Trihalomethanes	1999
Crookfur, Newton Mearns	Aluminium	1995
Darvel Valley	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Dervaig	Trihalomethanes	1994
Dumbarton Town	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1998
Furnace, Minard	Aluminium	1994
Garelochhead, Rhu, Rosneath	Trihalomethanes	2003
Girvan & Environs (South)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1994
Girvan & Environs (North)	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Greenock Town	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1996
Holyloch, Kilmun, Inellen & Dunoon & Environs	Aluminium	1993
Inverary, Bridge of Douglas	Aluminium	1994
Inverclyde West	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1996
Irvine	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Kilbirnie (North)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1992
Kilmarnock (North)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Kilmarnock (South)	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Kilmaurs	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Kilmelford	Trihalomethanes	1993
Kilmory (Lagg) Sliddery	Trihalomethanes	1998
Lamlash	Trihalomethanes	1996
Lenzie, Millerston, Muirhead & Stepps	Trihalomethanes	1998
Motherwell (Loch Lomond Supply)	Trihalomethanes	1998

Region/Supply Zone	Standards not fully met	Compliance Date for Zone
Muasdale	Aluminium	1992
Muirkirk	Trihalomethanes	2001
Neilston/Uplawmoor	Aluminium	1996
Newarthill (East)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Paisley (North)	Trihalomethanes	1998
Paisley (Town)	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1994
Pirnmill	Trihalomethanes	1997
Prestwick	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Renfrew East, Clarkston, Giffnock, North Mearns area	Aluminium	1995
Renfrewshire South	Aluminium	1994
Renfrewshire West	Trihalomethanes	1998
Roes of Mull	Trihalomethanes	1994
Rothesay	Aluminium	1994
Saddell	Trihalomethanes	1998
Saltcoats & Stevenston	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Skelmorlie	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1995
Stewarton and Environs	Aluminium, Trihalomethanes	1993
Strachur	Aluminium	1995
Tarbert	Aluminium	1994
Tayinloan	Trihalomethanes	1999
Tayvallich	Trihalomethanes	2000
Tobermory	Aluminium	1993
Troon, Dundonald (Kilwinning)	Aluminium, Lead	1993
Whitehouse	Trihalomethanes	2001
Western Isles		
Leverburgh	Lead	1997
Northton	Lead	1997
Rodel	Lead	1997

[1] "Bact." = microbiological parameters.
Note: "Compliance dates" are latest dates by which all parameters in zones will comply. Individual parameters may comply earlier.

Police Statistics

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of police officers operating in *(a)* Strathclyde region, *(b)* Argyll and *(c)* Isle of Bute for each year since 1975; what is the recommended establishment level for each; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer of 20 January 1992]:* The total police strength and authorised establishment levels for Strathclyde police for the years 1975 to 1991 are set out in the table below. Responsibility for the deployment of officers in different parts of the force area rests with the chief constable and figures relating to such deployment are not collected centrally.

Total police strength and establishment levels in Strathclyde region at 31 December

Year	Strength	Establishment
1975	6,478	6,992
1976	6,453	6,992
1977	6,230	6,981
1978	6,435	6,981
1979	6,905	6,977
1980	6,882	6,955
1981	6,845	6,955
1982	6,833	6,954
1983	6,816	6,954
1984	6,792	6,954
1985	6,816	6,954
1986	6,769	6,954
1987	6,773	6,954
1988	6,768	6,954
1989	6,887	6,954
1990	6,804	6,954
[1]1991	6,776	6,954

[1]Figures as at 31 December 1991 are not yet available. Figures have been provided as at 30 September 1991.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Medical Examinations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants were examined by doctors acting for his Department over the last 12 months for the purpose of assessing *(a)* attendance allowance, *(b)* mobility allowance and *(c)* attendance allowance where the claimant was aged over 65 years; what was the average fee paid to doctors for such examinations; and what was the overall cost to his Department of these examinations.

Mr. Scott: A medical examination is conducted for virtually all initial and subsequent claims to attendance allowance where the claim is not one made on the grounds of terminal illness. Available figures show that in 1991 454,000 such claims were processed. A proportion of the 45,000 requests for renewals of existing attendance allowance awards processed in disability benefit centres, and of the 73,000 decisions given on review, also required a medical examination.

There were 262,000 claims for mobility allowance. Apart from a small percentage, where the claimant clearly did not fulfil one of the qualifying conditions, each of these required a medical examination. A further 31,000 appeal cases also required medical examinations.

In December 1991 fees paid to doctors for attendance allowance and mobility allowance examinations conducted in their surgeries and customers homes ranged from £31 to £83·70, depending upon the type of examination and the time taken to complete it.

An estimate of the total cost of medical examinations for attendance allowance and mobility allowance could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigrants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the annual additional cost to the Exchequer of paying benefits to immigrants with limited leave to remain on the same basis as to immigrants with right of abode in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Strikers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of benefit paid to strikers and their families in benefits in each year since 1979 at current prices; and what was the average weekly payment per striker's family at current prices in each year.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is in the table.

Year	*Total benefit paid £ thousand*	*Average weekly benefit £*
1979-80	24,788	49·01
1980-81	1,384	43·56
1981-82	1,119	34·46
1982-83	1,190	40·09
1983-84	3,316	27·61
1984-85	51,329	30·33
1985-86	361	34·27
1986-87	689	33·08
1987-88	183	28·47
1988-89	671	28·43
1989-90	188	32·85
1990-91	80	37·77

Notes:
1. All years are 1 April – 31 March.
2. All figures have been revalued to 1991-92 terms using the GDP deflator.
3. Pre-1988-89 figures relate only to supplementary benefit. Figures from 1988-89 relate only to income support.

Source: Departmental database.

Young Claimants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the annual additional cost to the Exchequer of paying income support and housing support to claimants aged from 18 to 24 years at the full rate applicable to those aged 25 years and over.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that the additional annual cost of income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit would be £280 million.

Source: Modelled at 1991-92 prices and benefit levels using data drawn from the 1986-88 family expenditure surveys and the 1990 annual statistical inquiry.

Benefit Model Tables

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security with reference to the letter to the hon. Member for Norfolk, North of 25 October, why it was decided not to include a figure for travel-to-work expenses in his Department's benefit model tables.

Mr. Jack: As explained in the 1988 edition, the column showing travel-to-work expenses was discontinued in view of the inadequacy of a single average figure in this context and to reduce the number of arbitrary elements that used to appear in the tables.

Disability

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he will take to ensure that the disability living allowance and attendance allowance will be paid to those who are otherwise eligible and live in local authority homes or are sponsored by local authorities in private or voluntary homes.

Mr. Scott: Payment of attendance allowance and the care component of disability living allowance will cease after four weeks to avoid double provision for care needs. People in residential homes of any description may continue to receive the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will abolish the six-month waiting period for the attendance allowance and the three-month waiting period for the disability living allowance.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so, but we have abolished such waiting periods for the terminally ill.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will revise the rules for disability benefits such as mobility allowance and the proposed new disability living allowance so as to provide equal benefits for people disabled after the age of 65 years.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to do so.

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit applications were determined by each local authority in the London area in the last year for which data is available.

Miss Widdecombe: The information available is in the table.

Authority	*Total Claims April 1988-March 1989*	*Total Claims April 1989-March 1990*	*Total Claims April 1990-March 1991*
City of London	—	—	—
Camden	31,452	32,283	42,688
Greenwich	—	—	—
Hackney	—	—	—
Hammersmith	—	21,488	—
Islington	—	40,597	30,544
Kensington & Chelsea	—	—	23,427
Lambeth	—	—	—
Lewisham	—	—	—
Southwark	—	—	53,588
Tower Hamlets	—	34,664	38,462
Wandsworth	—	—	—
Westminster	41,492	24,508	—
Barking	30,126	36,172	29,466
Barnet	—	48,528	24,241
Bexley	17,799	—	—
Brent	24,200	—	—
Bromley	18,632	—	—
Croydon	—	—	—
Ealing	62,680	40,982	39,131
Enfield	15,890	27,243	14,018
Haringey	—	—	12,960
Harrow	14,239	17,031	9,178
Havering	21,366	16,792	21,330
Hillingdon	39,089	18,601	19,887
Hounslow	32,075	47,058	29,358
Kingston	19,406	22,563	12,180
Merton	15,182	—	—

Authority	Total Claims April 1988-March 1989	Total Claims April 1989-March 1990	Total Claims April 1990-March 1991
Newham	—	—	—
Redbridge	—	25,032	—
Richmond	—	—	—
Sutton	15,311	15,751	8,918
Waltham Forest	35,786	36,916	31,496

Notes:
a. Figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 relate to claims for rent rebates, rent allowances and/or rate rebates.
b. Figures for 1990-91 relate to claims for rent rebate and rent allowance only, following the introduction of community charge.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information is collected from local authorities on their performance in housing benefit management.

Miss Widdecombe: The housing benefit management information system collects key data on the number of claims processed within 14 days of receipt of all information necessary to assess the claim together with the number of review board hearings held within six weeks of request. Quarterly information on the number of outstanding claims will become available later this year. The returns also give other information which helps monitor performance. Full details are in circular HB/CCB (91)2 which is available in the Library.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what guidance is given to local authorities on the acceptable time in which to determine a housing benefit application.

Miss Widdecombe: Full statutory responsibility for the administration of the housing benefit scheme rests with local authorities which are required to ensure that the system is working effectively and in accordance with the rules of the scheme. Regulations prescribe that claims should be processed within 14 days of receipt of all the necessary information, or as soon as possible thereafter. Where, through no fault of the applicant, a claim cannot be settled within 14 days, interim payments should be made. Guidance issued to local authorities by the Department reflects those provisions.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on *(a)* the proportion of all claims for housing benefit which have been processed within 14 days, *(b)* the proportion of local authorities meeting claims for housing benefit within 14 days and *(c)* the extent to which where local authorities do not meet this target they make interim payments.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on the processing of housing benefit claims to local authorities in 1990-91 is not yet available. However, data are available for approximately two-thirds of authorities for the year 1989-90. In that year, about two-thirds of claims were processed within 14 days. Over 90 per cent. of authorities processed at least some claims within 14 days, and over 10 per cent. processed all claims within 14 days. Information on the provision of interim payments is not collected by the Department.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the housing benefit entitlement of a single person, living alone, whose sole income is what is currently available to a person on income support *(a)* for the ages of 16 and 17 years, *(b)* between the ages of 18 and 24 years and *(c)* between the age of 25 years and retirement age, where the private rented sector rent has been assessed as a reasonable market rent for housing benefit subsidy purposes as £30, £50, £100, and £150 per week, and the amount of housing benefit available as income rises by each £10 per week above income support level, up to £150 per week.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the tables.

(a) Claimant 16-17 Years

£	Income Support Level £	£	£	£	£	£	Income £	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	23·90	33·90	43·90	53·90	63·90	73·90	83·90	93·90	103·90	113·90	123·90	133·90	143·90	153·90
							Housing Benefit Entitlement							
Rent 30	30	30·00	25·13	18·63	12·13	5·63	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Rent 50	50	50·00	45·13	38·63	32·13	25·63	19·13	12·63	6·13	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Rent 100	100	100·00	95·13	88·63	82·13	75·63	69·13	62·63	56·13	49·63	43·13	36·63	30·13	23·63
Rent 150	150	150·00	145·13	138·63	132·13	125·63	119·13	112·63	106·13	99·63	93·13	86·63	80·13	73·63

(b) Claimant 18-24 Years

£	Income Support Level £	£	£	£	£	£	Income £	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
	31·40	41·40	51·40	61·40	71·40	81·40	91·40	101·40	111·40	121·40	131·40	141·40	151·40	
							Housing Benefit Entitlement							
Rent 30	30	26·75	20·25	13·75	7·25	0·75	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	

£	Income Support Level £	£	£	£	£	£	Income £	£	£	£	£	£	£
Rent 50	50	46·75	40·25	33·75	27·25	20·75	14·25	7·75	1·25	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Rent 100	100	96·75	90·25	83·75	77·25	70·75	64·25	57·75	51·25	44·75	38·25	31·75	25·25
Rent 150	150	146·75	140·25	133·75	127·25	120·75	114·25	107·75	101·25	94·75	88·25	81·75	75·25

(c) Claimant 25-60 Years

£	Income Support Level £	£	£	£	£	£	Income £	£	£	£	£	£	£
	39·65	49·65	59·65	69·65	79·65	89·65	99·65	109·65	119·65	129·65	139·65	149·65	
						Housing Benefit Entitlement							
Rent 30	30	26·75	20·25	13·75	7·25	0·75	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	
Rent 50	50	46·75	40·25	33·75	27·25	20·75	14·25	7·75	1·25	Nil	Nil	Nil	
Rent 100	100	96·75	90·25	83·75	77·25	70·75	64·25	57·75	51·25	44·75	38·25	31·75	
Rent 150	150	146·75	140·25	133·75	127·25	120·75	114·25	107·75	101·25	94·75	88·25	81·75	

Notes:
1. 16-17-year-olds who have no choice but to live independently receive the higher income support rate appropriate to 18-24-year-olds.
2. The calculations assume that the claimant is not entitled to any premiums.
3. The amount of housing benefit quoted for each level of rent assumes that the rent is fully eligible for Housing Benefit.
4. All calculations are based on the assumption that the income referred to is earnings, to which a disregard of £5 is appropriate.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the number of households claiming housing benefit whose payments are restricted by the local authority on the basis of a decision that the rent is unreasonably high, or the accommodation is considered too large.

Miss Widdecombe: The available information for 1989-90 suggests that there were between 15,000 and 30,000 housing benefit cases in Great Britain where benefit was restricted because the rent was considered unreasonably high. The number of cases where the accommodation is considered too large is not collected.

Source: Housing benefit management information system.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the annual cost to the Exchequer of reducing the disqualification period for unemployment benefit for those leaving a job without good cause from 26 to six weeks.

Mr. Jack: The annual cost of reducing the maximum period of disqualification for unemployment benefit from 26 to six weeks for those who lose their job through misconduct or voluntarily leave it without just cause, is estimated at around £35 million. This is based on the latest available figure of 14,746 disqualifications on these grounds in force on 9 May 1991.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total annual cost of benefits to the unemployed and their dependants in Scotland in 1990-91; and what are the estimated costs for 1991-92.

Mr. Jack: The information is not available in the form requested.

Pensioners

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total monetary equivalent per week of the income of an average single pensioner without savings, in receipt of a basic state pension and income support, inclusive of an average housing benefit payment and community charge rebate; and if he will also make a similar computation for an average pensioner couple.

Miss Widdecombe: Pensioners in receipt of a basic retirement pension and income support would receive the sums shown in the table.

Age		Single £		Couple £
60-74	IS	53·40	IS	83·25*
	HB	24·85	HB	24·46
	CCB	3·43	CCB	6·47
	Total	81·68	Total	114·18
75-79	IS	55·20	IS	85·60
	HB	24·85	HB	24·46
	CCB	3·43	CCB	6·47
	Total	83·48	Total	116·53
80+	IS	58·10	IS	88·45
	HB	24·85	HB	24·46
	CCB	3·43	CCB	6·47
	Total	86·38	Total	119·38

Notes:

1. IS—Income Support HB—Housing Benefit CCB—Community Charge Benefit
2. There are some pensioners who receive income which is *not* taken into account against Income Support entitlement. People in this group would receive extra income which is not reflected in the table.
3. The Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit figures are the averages of all cases where the claimant or partner is aged 60 or over.
4. *A couple aged between 60-74, in receipt of a basic Retirement Pension, would not be entitled to Income Support. The rate shown is the total of Retirement Pension payable to the claimant and spouse.

Students

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the annual cost to the Exchequer of means-tested benefits claimed by full-time students in each year since 1979, at current prices.

Miss Widdecombe: Information about the amount of benefits claimed by full-time students is not routinely kept and is therefore not available in the form requested.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he plans to extend the scope of eligibility for community care grants.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to extend the eligibility for community care grants. We will however be looking carefully at this question when the social policy research unit study on the social fund is published.

Independent Living Fund

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from the trustees of the independent living fund about the proposal for the successor body to the independent living fund not to help disabled people who were not in receipt of a payment from the independent living fund before 31 March 1993; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: A number of representations have been received from the trustees of the independent living fund and others about our proposals for the successor body since I announced outline details on 21 May 1991, (at columns *793-94*). These will be taken into account in shaping our plans.

Income Support

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give his estimate of the number of those aged 16 and 17 years who are currently excluded from income support entitlement and who would be in receipt of income support if the eligibility rules prior to September 1988 had still been in force.

Mr. Jack: The information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Fry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will issue regulations to disregard the proceeds of any unemployment mortgage protection policy in the assessment of income benefit, excluding mortgage repayments;

(2) if he will amend regulations so that premiums for an unemployment mortgage protection policy are added to any income support paid to an unemployed householder.

Miss Widdecombe: For loans that are eligible for income support help, we already disregard the following payments under mortgage protection policies:

the amount of the capital repayments, or the endowment premiums on an endowment mortgage;

the amount of interest not being met in income support because of the 50 per cent. restriction during the first 16 weeks of the claim;

the amount of the premiums due on the policy.

This allows claimants who have chosen to insure to retain an advantage over those who have not, while avoiding double provision for the same costs through income support and insurance.

We have no plans to change the arrangements for income support whereby insurance policy premiums for whatever purpose are met by the claimant from his benefit.

Care Allowance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that the present levels of care allowance will be reviewed to take into account the actual cost of residential and nursing home care before the transfer of the care element to local authorities begins in April 1993.

Miss Widdecombe: The income support limits applicable to people in residential care and nursing homes will continue to be reviewed annually.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what amount of heat can be purchased from the allowance to people who qualify under the cold weather payments scheme for *(a)* gas, *(b)* coal, *(c)* electricity and *(d)* oil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 16 December 1991 at column *83*.

Pension Funds

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will establish an advice line in his Department for those pension fund members who may be affected by fraud within or collapse of their pension funds; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so. The Occupational Pensions Advisory Service, a voluntary body receiving financial support from the Occupational Pensions Board under section 57B of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, already provides expert help and advice on occupational pension matters.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make it his policy to require each pension fund to furnish him with an annual statement on the performance of the fund and on the security of its investments; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy to require pension funds, on inquiry by members and on payment of an appropriate administration fee, to inform members of the application of the fund's investments; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Pension fund trustees already have a statutory obligation to make available free of charge, on request, the audited annual accounts of the fund to members and prospective members of the scheme, beneficiaries under the scheme and independent trade unions recognised for collective bargaining purposes in relation to members and prospective members of the scheme. The accounts must provide details of additions to and withdrawals from the scheme fund during the year in question and a statement of the assets at market value and the liabilities of the scheme, showing in relation to the assets and distribution of the investments of the scheme between prescribed categories of investment.

In addition, the trustees must make available for inspection free of charge the latest actuarial valuation together with an actuarial statement which includes the actuary's assessment of the security of accrued and prospective rights.

Those with statutory access to the accounts, actuarial valuation and actuarial statement have the opportunity to take such action as they feel appropriate in the light of information available to them.

There are additional safeguards in place for contracted-out salary related schemes. The Occupational Pensions Board is required to satisfy itself from time to time that a contracted-out scheme's resources are adequate to meet its liabilities for guaranteed minimum pensions.

We have no plans to require pension scheme trustees to furnish such information direct to the Department.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had from the National Union of Teachers about the mobility allowance; what reply he is sending; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have received a letter from the National Union of Teachers about mobility allowance, to which we shall reply soon.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Miss Widdecombe: To date, the Department has spent £10,000.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people between 1987 and 1992 in the Glanford and Scunthorpe constituency applied for *(a)* attendance allowance and *(b)* mobility allowance; and how many in each case were successful.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Unemployed Councillors

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will consult local authority organisations on the drafting of the regulations involving changes to the payment of allowances to unemployed councillors; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider including a disregard of the payment of attendance to unemployed councillors serving on local authorities when claiming unemployment benefit; and if he will make a statement;

(3) when the change of payment of allowances to unemployed councillors serving on local authorities will be introduced.

Mr. Jack: The Government responded positively to recent representations from local authority organisations and individual councillors, by proposing to exempt certain allowances payable to local authority councillors from the effects of the unemployment benefit £2 daily work test. The allowances affected are the basic and special responsibility allowances which are paid by way of remuneration for the office held. The Government decided that attendance allowance payable, in contrast, for specific official duties, should continue to be taken into account as earnings for the days on which those duties are performed. The proposal does not extend to the unemployment benefit weekly earnings rule. A councillor whose weekly earnings, including all allowances, exceed the lower earnings limit for national insurance contributions will, as now, not be entitled to unemployment benefit for that week. On 8 January 1992 the Social Security Advisory Committee agreed that the proposed amendment to the Social Security Benefit (Computation of Earnings) Regulations was wholly beneficial and need not be referred to them. We have advised the local authority associations of the proposal and informed them that the change should be in place very soon.

Social Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the demands being made on the funds of charitable bodies because assistance has not been forthcoming from the social fund.

Mr. Scott: We have no evidence to show that social fund arrangements have placed special demands on the funds of charitable bodies.

DEFENCE

Energy Savings

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much by way of grant his Department has paid to date for energy-saving measures, including insulation, in respect of service quarters for married or single personnel; and what energy savings he estimates have been thereby achieved.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Grants for energy-saving measures are not paid to the occupants of service quarters.

Instead, my Department has since the late 1970s, undertaken an extensive programme of insulation and other upgrading of married quarters as part of scheduled maintenance. A wide range of efficiency measures has also been undertaken in respect of barrack accommodation. A 17·3 per cent saving in energy use has been achieved on the defence estate as a whole over the last five years.

Trident

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the implication of the United States decision to research, develop and test an alternative propellant for the D5 missile for the in-service date of the United Kingdom Trident system.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am not aware of any plans by the United States to develop an alternative propellant for use in the Trident II D5 missile.

Hunting

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the fees payable by fox hunts for licences to hunt on Ministry of Defence land were last reviewed; and what plans he has to review them.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Fees payable by fox hunts for licences to hunt on Ministry of Defence land are reviewed at the commencement of each licence period and will continue to be reviewed at such times.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many applications for licences for fox hunts and deer hunts were made in (a) 1988, (b) 1989, (c) 1990 and (d) 1991; how many were accepted; and how many were rejected in each year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conditions relating to nature conservation are incorporated in the licence given to fox hunts to hunt on Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence continually seeks specialist advice regarding conservation on MOD land and takes account of this advice when drawing up licences permitting fox hunting on Ministry of Defence land.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the revenue obtained from the issue of licences to hunts to hunt on Ministry of Defence land covers the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 March 1991 at column *331*.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether licences given to fox hunts to hunt on Ministry of Defence land make any specific reference to *(a)* the digging out of foxes, *(b)* the blocking up of badger setts or *(c)* badgers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. MOD licences do stipulate, however, that the licensed activity must be conducted within the law and in accordance with any regulations or codes of good conduct.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what conditions a licence given to a fox hunt to hunt on Ministry of Defence land would be revoked.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Failure of a fox hunt to comply with the terms of the licence granted or any MOD regulations would be sufficient grounds on which to revoke the licence.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of Army horses transported to hunting meets in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Four hundred Army horses were transported to participate in hunting meets in 1990 and 323 in 1991. These figures count separately horses taken to more than one meet.

RAF Property

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish his Department's financial assessment of the re-sale values of RAF Brawdy and RAF Chivenor.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The information is commercial in confidence.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will enter into a management agreement with a housing association or local authority on the empty properties situated on the Bryn Trewan estate at RAF Valley, to use them for rented accommodation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. These surplus properties are currently being offered for sale in bulk on the open market by competitive tender.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many properties on the Bryn Trewan estate at RAF Valley belonging to his Department are empty; for what period of time they have been empty; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are 60 vacant married quarters in the Bryn Trewan area of RAF Valley. The majority of these have been vacant for between one and two years.

Falklands

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British service men are serving currently in the Falklands; and how long is the average tour of duty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We maintain forces at the level necessary to meet our commitment to the defence of the Falklands. Details of these force levels are classified. Most service personnel in the Falklands serve on a four-month posting.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from which subheads of which votes the funds for the nuclear testing programme are taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Funding in respect of the nuclear testing programme is provided from class I, defence vote 2—defence procurement. It is not our practice to reveal further detail of the funding arrangements.

Yellow Sun Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Yellow Sun family of weapons.

Mr. Alan Clark: I do not recognise the category to which the hon. Member refers.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, South, *Official Report*, 17 December, column *132*, if he will state the obligations placed on the United Kingdom under the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A copy of the non-proliferation treaty is available in the Library of the House.

Iran

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he possesses about Iran's alleged build-up in arms and military equipment, including nuclear technology and know-how that can be put to military use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Iran has recently acquired new combat aircraft and surface to surface missiles and may be seeking new tanks. The Iranian navy is likely to obtain its first conventional submarine soon. Iran is a state party to the non-proliferation treaty and is pursuing a nuclear technology development programme, but has publicly denied that this is aimed at the acquisition of nuclear weapons. The United Kingdom has consistently made clear the significance which it attaches to all states party to the NPT complying fully with all their obligations.

Foreign Armed Services

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish details of the training provided by his Department to personnel of foreign armed services from 1 October 1987 to 1 October 1991.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Training is provided in a variety of military subjects for personnel of foreign armed services. Details are generally confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the overseas government concerned.

Human Rights

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will describe the scope of training in human rights that is included in training provided to personnel of foreign armed services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Human rights are addressed in courses available to foreign and United Kingdom military students where appropriate.

Rescue Operations, 22 Squadron

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of rescue operations carried out by 22 Squadron from RAF Leuchars in each of the last five years for which information is available; and of these how many involved the rescue of service personnel and how many involved the rescue of civilians.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The search and rescue operations carried out by 22 Squadron, based at RAF Leuchars, for the last 5 years are as follows:

Year	*Callouts*	*Total number rescued*	*Civilians rescued*	*Military rescued*
1987	113	101	75	26
1988	152	138	112	26
1989	133	93	78	15
1990	125	65	61	4
1991	162	109	104	5

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when members of 22 Squadron stationed at RAF Leuchars were informed that search-and-rescue operations at RAF Leuchars were to be discontinued from 1 October;

(2) if he will make a statement about the future of search-and-rescue operations at RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No decision on the future of search-and-rescue operations at RAF Leuchars has yet been taken.

RAF Leuchars

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Wessex aircraft are presently deployed at RAF Leuchars; and how many flying hours the individual aircraft have undergone;

(2) what is the current manpower strength of 22 Squadron stationed at RAF Leuchars.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: B flight 22 search and rescue squadron stationed at RAF Leuchars has 33 personnel. Two Wessex helicopters are currently deployed at RAF Leuchars. By 17 January 1992 one aircraft had flown 8,293 hours and the other 9,211 hours, since manufacture.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many rescues have been effected as a result of search-and-rescue operations from RAF Leuchars *(a)* in daylight hours and *(b)* after dusk having been commenced in daylight, since the restriction to daylight only working was imposed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: From 1 October 1989, when the daylight working only restriction was imposed, to the end of 1991, RAF Leuchars responded to 308 callouts and 184 people were rescued. Of these, 11 were callouts which commenced in daylight but continued after dusk and nine people were rescued.

Sir Peter Levene

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date Sir Peter Levene left the employment of his Department.

Mr. Alan Clark: Sir Peter Levene's last day of service with my Department was 31 March 1991.

Disability Compensation

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider paying part compensation to those injured members of the armed forces whose claims are being withheld pending precise assessment and agreement as to the final level of their disability.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The MOD already makes such interim payments.

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the claims now outstanding under the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987, showing names, disability claimed and date of accident.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. To do so would be a breach of medical confidentiality.

Contract Employment

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the current totals of those employed in his Department's contracts in the United Kingdom and the percentage of this figure for Scotland.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimates of regional employment arising from my Department's equipment expenditure are published in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991, Volume 2," table 6.9, a copy of which is held in The House of Commons Library.

RAF Greenham Common

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place between himself and the Commander of the United States Air Force about the withdrawal of United States Air Force personnel from RAF Greenham Common this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We keep closely in touch with the United States authorities about plans for their forces stationed in the United Kingdom.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 January 1992

HOME DEPARTMENT

Extradition

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the countries with which the United Kingdom has extradition arrangements in which there is no obligation on a requesting country to provide evidence amounting to prima facie guilt.

Mr. John Patten: The following countries, listed in part 1 of schedule 2 to the European Convention on Extradition Order 1990—1990 No. 1507—do not have to provide prima facie evidence:
Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

Prison Suicides

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of suicides in prisons in England and Wales during the year 1991; and if he will list the prisons and the number of suicides that took place within them.

Mrs. Rumbold: The total number of deaths in 1991 which resulted from an act of deliberate self-harm was 41. Of the 26 inquests which have so far been held into these deaths, a verdict of suicide was recorded in 20. The establishments at which the deaths occurred are listed in the table.

Deaths at HM Prison Service Establishments in 1991 resulting from an act of deliberate self-harm

Establishment	*Number of Deaths*
Birmingham	3
Bristol	1
Brixton	1
Cardiff	1
Dorchester	1
Durham	1
Featherstone	1
Feltham	2
Full Sutton	2
Garth	1
Glen Parva	1
Gloucester	1
Grendon	2
Haverigg	1
Leeds	2
Liverpool	3
Long Lartin	1
Manchester	2
The Mount	1
Norwich	2
Nottingham	1
Oxford	1
Parkhurst	1
Pentonville	1
Preston	1
Stafford	1
Stoke Heath	1
Wakefield	1
Wandsworth	1
Winchester	1
Wormwood Scrubs	1

Police Cells

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present nightly cost of keeping a remand prisoner in police station cells.

Mrs. Rumbold: The current average daily cost of keeping a prisoner in a police cell is £228.

Rule 43 Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women, were being held under rule 43 in prisons in England and Wales on 13 January.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers of prisoners removed from association under rule 43 of the prison rules and rule 46 of the young offender institution rules on 13 January were as follows:

	Number
Males	2,236
Females	16

Animal Rights

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) from which sources the names on the animal rights national index are obtained;

(2) what measures he takes to ensure that the animal rights national index does not include those involved only in legitimate and legal campaigning.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The animal rights national index holds information received from police forces throughout Great Britain. The use of the index is the operational responsibility of chief officers of police.

Mr. Steve Wyatt (Photographs)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the amount of police time expended on investigating the discovery of photographs involving the Texan business man Mr. Steve Wyatt.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. This is an operational matter for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to issue a Green Paper on the division of occupational pension rights on divorce.

The Attorney-General: I have no plans to issue a Green Paper on this subject. Occupational pensions fall within the ministerial responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Dr. Malde Modhwadia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what was the cost to public funds of the retrial of Dr. Malde Modhwadia of 245 Goodwood road, Leicester, which took place on 6, 7 and 8 January.

The Attorney-General: The legal aid costs of Dr. Modhwadia's solicitors and counsel have yet to be determined. However the prosecution costs, that is counsel's fees and witness expenses, were £3,626·72 and the costs incurred by the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Consolidated Fund amount to approximately £5,500.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the time taken to bring the case of Dr. Malde Modhwadia of 245 Goodwood road, Leicester, to retrial.

The Attorney-General: On 25 June 1991 the Court of Appeal criminal division allowed Dr. Modhwadia's appeal against conviction and ordered a fresh trial. The Crown Court at Northampton was notifed of that judgment on 24 July. Subsequently, on 19 August, those representing Dr. Modhwadia informed the court that they would not be ready for trial until January 1992. The trial took place between 6 January and 8 January 1992.

Insolvency Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by year, for the last 10 years, the number of companies that have been wound up by the High Court due to trading while insolvent.

The Attorney-General: The only figures available, as set out in the table, for the number of companies that have been wound up over the last 10 years in England and Wales are for the years 1983 to 1990. Full figures for 1991 are not yet available.

Total number of orders made in the High Court on Petitions presented for winding up of companies including orders for winding up on grounds of insolvency

Year	*Orders made*
1983	3,967
1984	4,203
1985	4,882
1986	4,591
1987	3,744
1988	3,092
1989	3,436
1990	5,037

Rape (Juveniles)

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Attorney-General if he will review the advice given to judges in the sentencing of male juveniles convicted of rape; and what representations he has received on this subject since 13 December.

The Attorney-General: Subject to the statutory limits laid down by Parliament, sentencing policy is a matter for the Court of Appeal criminal division which from time to time issues guidance to the judiciary. This takes the form of a judicial decision, with general comment which may be expressed as formal guidelines setting the class of offence in the general context of the court's overall sentencing practice. The court has issued guidelines for rape and they are contained in the judgment in the case of R v. Billam which is reported in the 1986 "Criminal Appeal Reports" at page 347. The court has given no separate guidance for the sentencing of juveniles convicted of rape.

I have received 10 letters on this subject in the period between 13 December 1991 and 17 January 1992 and my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has received 19 over the same period.

ENVIRONMENT

Vacant Public Land

17. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure vacant, dormant, derelict and under-utilised sites in public ownership in urban areas are built on first before green-field sites beyond city boundaries are used.

35. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure vacant, dormant, derelict and under-utilised sites in public ownership in urban areas are built on first before green-belt sites beyond city boundaries are used.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friends to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs).

City of Birmingham (Bankers)

18. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the tendering procedure that has resulted in the appointment of the Co-operative bank as bankers to the city of Birmingham.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received one representation.

UN Conference on Environment and Development

19. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the progress of preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

Mr. Trippier: The United Kingdom Government are taking an active role in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in June 1992. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has indicated that he intends to lead the United Kingdom delegation and is encouraging other Heads of Government to attend. We have submitted our national report for UNCED; we have prepared reports for the preparatory committee on technology transfer and population; we are providing financial assistance so that developing countries can play an effective part in the preparations; and we are consulting non-governmental organisations, business and local government on their preparations for UNCED. We have also pledged £40·3 million to the global environment facility which is helping developing countries to address global environmental problems.

Housing Associations (Funding Allocations)

20. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of current developments within the control of housing associations out of public funds are *(a)* for private ownership and *(b)* for public letting; what are the total numbers in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation estimates that this financial year its approved development programme will provide 2,400 homes for low-cost home ownership and 24,700 homes available for letting. These figures represent, respectively, 9 and 91 per cent. of the total number of completions.

Next year, the Housing Corporation will introduce a major programme of "do-it-yourself" shared ownership. This will be targeted on existing council and housing association tenants, thereby releasing rented accommodation for the homeless.

Local Government Finance

21. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from local authorities on the present revenue grant system.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has received 301 written representations from local authorities and their associations on the revenue grant settlement. In addition, Ministers have held meetings with 62 local authorities to discuss the settlement.

34. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the amount of capital receipts currently being held by local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: Based on the most recent returns submitted by local authorities to my Department, it is provisionally estimated that the amount of capital receipts held by authorities in England at 31 March 1991 was £6·5 billion. Of this total, it is estimated that authorities had set aside £5·1 billion to redeem debt and that £1·4 billion was available to finance capital expenditure.

RECHAR

22. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present situation with regard to the release of RECHAR funding; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The United Kingdom's RECHAR programmes are being blocked by Commissioner Millan's unjustifiable refusal to approve them.

31. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is given by his Department to local authorities on applications under the RECHAR programme for EC support for environmental projects in former coal-mining areas.

Mr. Yeo: None at present, as the United Kingdom's RECHAR programmes are being blocked by Commissioner Millan's unjustifiable refusal to approve them.

Development Projects

23. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with Commissioner Ripa di Meana concerning the effect of directive 85/337/EEC on British development projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: There have been a number of exchanges between Ministers and the Commissioner about the application of the directive. I discussed the matter with him yesterday and contacts will continue while the Commission considers the Government's recent response to the Commission's letter of 17 October about the application of the directive in the United Kingdom.

Housing Association Properties

24. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many additional housing association properties for rent he estimates will be completed during 1991-92.

Sir George Young: The Housing Corporation estimates that its approved development programme will provide 21,800 new homes for rent in the current financial year. This includes 1,800 homes brought back into use by the corporation's short-life repair programme—"mini-HAG". In addition, 2,900 homes will be released for reletting by the corporation's tenants incentive scheme.

Poll Tax

25. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on poll tax arrears in England and Wales.

Mr. Key: At the end of September 1991 authorities in England had, on average, received 95 per cent. of the community charge that they expected to collect for 1990-91 and 39 per cent. of that amount for 1991-92.

New Council Houses

26. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new council houses will be completed in the United Kingdom in the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Yeo: Based on reported activity to November 1991, English local authorities are expected to complete 7,000 to 8,000 dwellings in 1991-92.

We do not plan a specific level of council house building. It is for local authorities to propose how best to use the resources made available under their housing investment programme allocations. Housing associations are now the main providers of new subsidised rented housing, and public expenditure provision for the Housing Corporation is planned to increase from £1·1 billion last year to over £2 billion by 1993-94, when output of housing by associations will rise to over 50,000.

For information about other parts of the United Kingdom, I refer the hon. Member to the Secretaries of State concerned.

Local Authority Homes

27. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the number of local authority empty homes at June 1979, June 1983, June 1987 and June 1991; and what is the most recent available figure.

Mr. Yeo: The Department gets this information from local authorities in their annual housing investment programme returns, and this gives the position at 1 April. The latest available figures relate to April 1991.

England totals

April	*Number*
1979	100,000
1983	114,000
1987	112,000
1991	83,000

London (Development Policy)

28. **Sir Anthony Durant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider changing the policy on development to a greater emphasis on the east of London rather than the west of London.

Mr. Heseltine: I am reviewing the existing regional guidance for the south-east—PPG9—which already aims to redress the balance of attraction between the eastern and western parts of the region. I have appointed consultants to study the east Thames corridor—the area stretching from docklands to Tilbury and the Medway towns—to help in considering options for the future location of development in the south-east.

Rents-to-mortgages Scheme

2. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to extend the rents-to-mortgages scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The pilot schemes in Basildon and Milton Keynes have so far helped about 100 new town tenants into owner-occupation, and they have successfully tested the working of rents to mortgages. We will now consider whether to extend the scheme to local authority tenants.

River Quality

30. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the chairman of the National Rivers Authority to discuss the quality of water in rivers.

Mr. Trippier: I meet Lord Crickhowell regularly to discuss matters relating to the National Rivers Authority's responsibilities for the water environment, including river quality.

32. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made in cleaning up rivers.

Mr. Trippier: The National Rivers Authority's 1990 river quality survey showed that despite a small net deterioration in water quality, around 90 per cent. of our rivers, canals and estuaries are of good or fair quality—compared with the average of 75 per cent. for the European Community.

The survey was too soon to reflect the major investment on which the industry has embarked following privatisation, or the vigorous action being taken by the NRA against polluters. The system of statutory water quality objectives will help ensure that a real and sustained improvement in water quality is achieved.

SSSIs

33. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the protection of sites of special scientific interest in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: The appropriate territorial conservation agencies are continuing the good work of the Nature Conservancy Council in notifying sites of special scientific interest. As at 31 March 1991 the Nature Conservancy Council had notified a total of 5,671 SSSIs covering 1·8 million hectares—8 per cent. of Great Britain. The additional safeguards for SSSIs announced by the Government in September 1991 came into effect on 2 January 1992.

Grants

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the level of grant per head of population for each of the standard economic regions and in Greater London in the financial years 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87, 1989-90 for *(a)* rate support grant, *(b)* housing revenue subsidy, *(c)* total specific and supplementary grants and *(d)* urban programme;

(2) if he will list the level of grant per head of population in the financial years 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87 and 1989-90 for *(a)* rate support grant, *(b)* housing revenue subsidy, *(c)* total specific and supplementary grants and *(d)* urban programme for (i) Blackburn, (ii) Burnley, (iii) Knowsley, (iv) Liverpool, (v) Manchester, (vi) Preston, (vii) Rochdale, (viii) Salford, (ix) Middlesbrough, (x) Birmingham, (xi) Coventry, (xii) Sandwell, (xiii) Wolverhampton, (xiv) Leicester, (xv) Nottingham, (xvi) Bradford and (xvii) Kingston-upon-Hull;

(3) if he will list the level of grant per head of population in the financial years 1980-81, 1983-84, 1986-87 and 1989-90 for *(a)* rate support grant, *(b)* housing revenue subsidy, *(c)* total specific and supplementary grants and *(d)* the urban programme for (i) Brent, (ii) Greenwich, (iii) Hackney, (iv) Hammersmith and Fulham, (v) Haringey, (vi) Islington, (vii) Kensington and Chelsea, (viii) Lambeth, (ix) Lewisham, (x) Newham, (xi) Southwark, (xii) Tower Hamlets and (xiii) Wandsworth.

Mr. Key: The available information has been placed in the Library of the House.

Enterprise Zones

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment at what date an application was made by Her Majesty's Government to the Commission of the European Community for permission to establish the existing enterprise zone in the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets; and if he will list the article(s) of the treaty of Rome which require applications

to be made to a Member of the European Commission for the establishment of additional zones in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Key: Under article 93(2) of the EC treaty, the Commission may require member states to alter or abolish existing or proposed systems of aid.

The Government wrote on 26 March 1980 to inform the European Commission, as required by article 93(3), of their intention to set up a number of enterprise zones including one comprising parts of the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets. The Commission raised no objections.

Home Insulation

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what targets his Department has set for home insulation; and what progress has been made towards meeting these targets.

Mr. Yeo: The Government's aim of upgrading the Building Regulations standard for energy efficiency of new buildings by 20 per cent. was achieved though the revised regulations which came into force in 1990. We are now reviewing the scope for further strengthening of the standard. The green house demonstration programme for existing council housing requires a 25 per cent. increase in energy efficiency in participating schemes. I anticipate that by the end of 1994 all programme schemes will have met this target. The Department does not set central targets for other insulation programmes carried out by local authorities and housing associations.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the national programme for limiting carbon dioxide emissions to which he committed the United Kingdom at the joint session of EC environment and energy councils on 13 December; and if he will use his powers under section 3(5)(a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to make a plan for establishing limits for the total amount of carbon dioxide which may be released into the environment in any period in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: The environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance" (Cm 1200) set out the Government's strategy and a first tranche of measures towards Britain's conditional target of returning CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2005. The first year report—Cm 1655—sets out progress with this strategy. My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to use his Environmental Protection Act 1990 powers to make a plan for establishing limits for carbon dioxide emissions.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, columns *422-23*, if he will specify which decisions listed in the answer were on application by *(a)* British Coal and *(b)* private companies; and if he will give the corresponding figures for appeal refusals.

Mr. Yeo: The information requested is as follows:

Table 1 Appeals by British Coal: Planning permission granted

Planning authority	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1 April 1991 to 30 November 1991*
Barnsley	—	—	1	—	—
Bolton	1	—	—	—	—
Derbyshire	1	1	2	—	—
County Durham	1	2	—	—	—
Northumberland	1	1	—	—	—
Total	4	4	3	0	0

Table 2 Appeals by private companies/individuals: Planning permission granted

Planning authority	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1 April 1991 to 30 November 1991*
Derbyshire	1	1	—	2	—
County Durham	2	1	3	3	4
Gateshead	—	—	—	1	—
Huntingdon	—	—	—	1	—
Lancashire	—	1	—	—	—
Leeds	—	—	1	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	1	—	—
North Tyneside	—	—	—	1	—
Northumberland	—	—	—	1	1
Staffordshire	—	1	—	—	—
Wakefield	—	—	—	—	2
Total	3	4	5	9	7

Table 3 Appeals by British Coal: Planning permission refused

Planning authority	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1 April 1991 to 30 November 1991*
Greater Manchester	—	1	—	—	—
Staffordshire	1	—	—	—	—
County Durham	2	—	—	—	—
Bolton	—	1	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	1	—	—	—

Planning authority	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1 April 1991 to 30 November 1991
Nottinghamshire	—	—	—	1	—
Derbyshire	—	—	—	1	—
West Midlands	1	—	—	—	—
Total	4	3	0	2	0

Table 4 Appeals by private companies/individuals: Planning permission refused

Planning authority	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1 April 1991 to 30 November 1991
Gloucestershire	—	1	—	—	—
Staffordshire	—	—	—	1	—
County Durham	—	1	—	—	—
Northumberland	1	1	—	1	—
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2	1	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	2	—	—
Derbyshire	1	1	—	—	—
Total	4	5	2	2	0

Housing Corporation

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning meets the chairman of the Housing Corporation from time to time to discuss various corporation matters.

Housing Co-operatives

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made to expand the number of housing co-operatives and other tenant-led initiatives.

Mr. Yeo: On local authority estates, 30 tenant management co-operatives and estate management boards have been established since last April, compared with 15 in the previous year, while a further 100 groups are exploring or developing a management option.

There are 265 ownership co-operatives registered with the Housing Corporation compared with 255 three years ago. In addition, there are now 60 tenant management co-operatives in the housing association stock.

Bedfordshire County Council (Sales)

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of money that Bedfordshire county council has raised since 1979 by way of *(a)* land sales and *(b)* sale of buildings; of that amount what is the county council allowed to spend; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The capital receipts raised by Bedfordshire from the sale of fixed assets in each year since 1984-85 are as follows. Information is not available for years prior to 1984-85. It is not possible to identify land sales separately from sale of buildings.

At 31 March 1990 Bedfordshire held £3,000 of capital receipts—not only from the sale of fixed assets—of which £1,000 were usable, the remainder being set aside for debt redemption. Of the £5·704 million estimated to have been received since then from the sale of fixed assets, £2·662 million is usable.

Year	Receipts from the sale of Fixed Assets £'000
1984-85	2,862
1985-86	6,630
1986-87	5,337
1987-88	4,024
1988-89	4,467
1989-90	12,316
1990-91	1,666
[1]1991-92	4,038

[1] estimate

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of money that the four district councils within the county of Bedfordshire have raised since 1979 by *(a)* sale of council houses and *(b)* land sales; of that amount how much each authority is currently allowed to spend; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The reported total discounted sale values of dwellings, and the value of land sold between April 1979 and September 1991 is as follows. Actual cash receipts from sales of dwellings in any year will depend on the extent to which sales were financed by loans from these authorities. The table also shows the reported amounts of unspent housing capital receipts at 1 April 1991 which were available to spend after making the required provision for debt repayment. In addition authorities can spend 25 per cent. of most housing capital receipts received in 1991-92.

£ million

	Total value of sales (after discounts) April 1979 to September 1991		Remaining usable housing receipts April 1991
	council houses/ and land	of which: land	
Luton	[1]90	10	11
Mid Bedfordshire	[1]50	..	5
North Bedfordshire	[1]105	5	10
South Bedfordshire	[1]70	15	3

.. Less than £5 million.
[1] Information missing for certain years or quarters.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to arrange that interest is paid when repaying sums which have been taken which are in excess of the final agreed figures for the uniform business rate.

Mr. Key: Regulations providing for the payment of interest where an overpayment of non-domestic rates has occurred due to an alteration of a rating list came into force in October 1990. Interest is paid for each financial year at a rate one per cent. below bank base rate as at 15 March prior to the start of that year.

Subsidiarity

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he will take to ensure that the reform of local government structure embodies the principle of subsidiarity.

Mr. Key: The proposed local government commission will be required to recommend the structural changes it thinks desirable having regard to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and to secure effective and convenient local government.

Estate Action (Wolverhampton)

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to what extent Wolverhampton has benefited from Estate Action.

Mr. Yeo: Up to this year the Council has received £11·695 million of estate action support for 10 schemes. I look forward to continuing this support in future years and a further £6·729 million has already been earmarked for the next three years.

Planning Policy Guidance

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the revision of planning policy guidance note 7 will be published; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today published a revised planning policy guidance note 7, entitled "The Countryside and the Rural Economy". This replaces the first edition of PPG 7, published in 1988.

We are grateful to the many bodies and individuals who responded to the consultation draft of the new PPG. Lists of their submissions are being placed in the Library of the House, where copies will be available on request.

The new PPG emphasises the importance the Government attach to the countryside and the health of the rural economy. It reminds planning authorities of the need for a balanced approach to rural development and conservation. The advice takes forward the environmental strategy in our White Paper "This Common Inheritance" and sets out policies for planning in the countryside in the 1990s.

Development is necessary to sustain the rural economy. It needs to be integrated with protection of the countryside for the sake of its beauty, the diversity of its landscape, the wealth of its natural resources and its ecological, agricultural and recreational value. Planning authorities need to weigh these considerations, paying particular regard to special designations such as national parks.

The PPG gives greater protection to national parks, implementing the new policy on major developments there which we announced yesterday in response to the national parks review. Such developments should only take place in exceptional circumstances, after being shown to be in the public interest.

Among other things, the new PPG also emphasises new directions and opportunities in the rural economy, as employment in traditional industries shrinks; points out that the re-use of rural buildings can reduce pressure for new building in the open countryside; advises on stricter planning controls over the siting and appearance of agricultural buildings, which came into effect this month; strengthens guidance on new dwellings in the countryside for agricultural workers, to counter abuse.

Combustion Plants

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that a programme for reducing total annual emissions from large combustion plants is being implemented in all EC countries.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* Enforcement of the large combustion plants directive in other member states is a matter for the European Commission, but the Government take every opportunity to stress the importance of other member states' matching the United Kingdom's performance in implementing this and other environmental directives. Our proposal for a Community "audit-type" inspectorate to ensure effective compliance with European environmental legislation would help to achieve improved and consistent standards throughout the Community.

WALES

Council House Sales

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the capital receipts held on deposit from the sale of council housing to those whose homes they are for each council in Wales, for each year since 1979; for what reason it has not been decided to make provision for these moneys to be returned to the ratepayers/chargepayers; and what interest has accrued in each year to each of those councils.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Under the arrangements brought into effect on 1 April 1990 by part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, local authorities are required to set aside a proportion of their capital receipts —the "reserved part"—as prudent financial provision for credit liabilities. The balance—the "usable part"—is available for any capital purpose. Authorities must also repay at least a prescribed minimum amount of debt from revenue each year.

Authorities are not, however, required to redeem debt from the reserved part immediately. The timing of debt redemption from capital receipts is left to each authority to decide in its own circumstances.

In Wales, to encourage the provision of low-cost home ownership, certain capital receipts have a nil reserved part allowing full recycling of the receipt. These include sales of undeveloped housing land, sales of housing on shared equity terms and sales of housing where the purchaser is required to make significant repairs or improvements as a condition of sale. Details are given in schedule 1, part II of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1990.

Set out in the table, for each authority, are the figures for the total outstanding housing revenue account debt at 31 March 1991, the unredeemed, reserved part of capital receipts at 31 March 1990 and 31 March 1991 and the total of HRA 1990-91 in-year receipts applied to debt redemption in that year.

Under the capital control system in force before 1 April 1990, authorities could use a proportion of their in-year and accumulated cash capital receipts for new capital expenditure each year for certain "prescribed" expenditure and could spend without such restriction on "non prescribed" items. There was no reserved part.

The information requested on interest accrued is not held centrally.

(£ thousands)

	Outstanding HRA loan debt at 31 March 1991	*Unredeemed HRA reserved part at 31 March 1990*[1,2]	*Unredeemed HRA reserved part at 31 March 1991*[1]	*1990-91 in-year HRA receipts redeemed in 1990-91*
Alyn and Deeside	22,266	1,600	3,260	0
Colwyn	14,533	1,624	2,151	0
Delyn	18,987	0	0	999
Glyndwr	8,804	2,021	0	654
Rhuddlan	10,707	2,046	2,672	0
Wrexham Maelor	43,200	6,576	0	3,246
Carmarthen	26,214	2,667	3,150	0
Ceredigion	17,453	3,561	0	1,382
Dinefwr	14,108	183	1,733	0
Llanelli	21,378	56	0	1,752
Preseli Pembrokeshire	16,576	3,416	5,831	0
South Pembrokeshire	7,254	3,458	0	843
Blaenau Gwent	76,671	4,060	1,939	0
Islwyn	35,395	5,569	6,458	0
Monmouth	30,424	2,110	3,812	0
Newport	74,408	7,709	0	2,058
Torfaen	57,112	2,342	5,538	0
Aberconwy	8,006	4,253	5,008	0
Arfon	14,279	3,932	4,285	0
Dwyfor	4,466	243	33	410
Meirionnydd	4,906	1,100	1,616	0
Ynys Mon	30,678	3,095	4,499	0
Cynon Valley	26,259	1,671	2,801	0
Merthyr Tydfil	33,316	1,812	0	1,042
Ogwr	43,586	3,224	5,524	0
Rhondda	48,336	0	490	0
Rhymney Valley	54,120	3,616	4,859	1,210
Taff-Ely	29,211	4,720	9,516	0
Brecknock	15,181	5,234	6,096	0
Montgomeryshire	14,816	6,791	7,576	0
Radnorshire	9,666	2,585	3,094	0
Cardiff	100,758	0	5,286	0
Vale of Glamorgan	35,826	16,669	19,728	0
Port Talbot	19,949	1,739	1,744	464
Lliw Valley	27,692	2,718	4,549	0
Neath	25,212	1,125	2,561	0
Swansea	64,274	689	3,839	0
Total Wales	1,106,027	114,214	129,648	14,060

[1] Unredeemed reserved part of capital receipts relating to Housing Revenue Account services, at 31 March, as reported by local authorities.
[2] At midnight i.e. at the introduction of the new capital control system.

Works of Art

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of publicly owned works of art is available for viewing by the public; what steps have been taken to maximise income for the arts by renting out works of art when that would not impair public viewing; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Secretary of State has direct responsibility only for works of art in the ownership of Cadw Welsh Historic Monuments, of which 97 per cent. are available for public view. Information on items owned by non-departmental public bodies in Wales is not held centrally.

There are no plans for a scheme of the kind suggested.

Pregnancy (Health Care)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will implement a campaign to educate pregnant women and their health carers in Wales about toxoplasmosis and its prevention;

(2) which health authorities in Wales provide information on infectious disease during pregnancy to pregnant women; which health authorities provide specific information about the prevention of toxoplasmosis to pregnant women; which health authorities in Wales routinely test pregnant women for toxoplasmosis; and which test pregnant women on demand for toxoplasmosis.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department issued in October 1991 the leaflet "While you are Pregnant: Safe eating and how to avoid infection from food and animals". This leaflet includes information on toxoplasmosis, and directors of midwifery and family health services authorities have been asked to distribute the leaflet, which is free of charge, to pregnant women in Wales. In addition, the Health Education Authority's pregnancy book is provided to women on their first visit to an ante-natal clinic. The Health Promotion Authority for Wales has circulated this widely in Wales and all health authority health promotion units have copies as well as GPs. The booklet warns women of the possible dangers of infectious diseases including toxoplasmosis and advises on how they can be avoided.

Information on which health authorities routinely test pregnant women for toxoplasmosis and which test pregnant women on demand for toxoplasmosis is not held centrally.

Council Housing

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average amount allocated per household for maintenance work on council houses in each district council in Wales for each year since 1988; and what are the estimated allocations per council household for 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is set out in the table.

These are the allowances set for subsidy purposes only. It is for authorities to set their own spending levels in their particular circumstances. The basis for calculating the allowances was changed in 1990-91 and further refined for 1991-92 and 1992-93. The figures for years before 1990-91 are not comparable with the later years.

Estimates of management and maintenance allowances for dwellings in the Housing Revenue Account[1] (£)

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Alyn and Deeside	n.a.	346	416	544	634
Colwyn	396	436	582	622	682
Delyn	461	507	723	723	755
Glyndwr	n.a.	357	574	642	709
Rhuddlan	338	363	578	611	666
Wrexham Maelor	309	335	415	603	717
Carmarthen	486	537	682	682	714
Ceredigion	483	522	636	636	668
Dinefwr	n.a.	304	440	560	646
Llanelli	424	469	725	818	909
Preseli Pembrokeshire	461	506	676	681	730
South Pembrokeshire	386	421	649	674	724
Blaenau Gwent	474	520	678	702	751
Islwyn	450	498	729	729	761
Monmouth	611	679	946	946	978
Newport	409	447	506	540	591
Torfaen	466	513	664	664	698
Aberconwy	348	381	787	787	819
Arfon	n.a.	542	699	744	807
Dwyfor	299	342	608	761	862
Meirionnydd	435	521	781	781	813
Ynys Mon	448	498	577	607	657
Cynon Valley	400	436	689	723	778
Merthyr Tydfil	377	440	663	663	708
Ogwr	527	381	694	694	729
Rhondda	445	491	851	851	883
Rhymney Valley	460	520	643	705	772
Taff Ely	441	514	761	761	793
Brecknock	432	458	562	625	696
Montgomeryshire	391	398	576	651	719
Radnorshire	368	405	619	606	644

	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Cardiff	428	460	885	885	917
Vale of Glamorgan	447	467	913	913	945
Lliw Valley	374	410	639	718	791
Neath	381	419	586	655	726
Port Talbot	450	357	931	931	988
Swansea	n.a.	467	651	699	763

[1] The estimates are derived from information supplied by the local authorities and, for the last three years, are provisional.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the average council house rent charges per household in each district council area in Wales for each year from 1988 onwards; and what are the estimated levels for 1992.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is set out in the table for 1988-89 to 1991-92. Authorities are in the process of setting their rents for 1992-93.

Local authority dwellings: average weekly actual rents[1]

	1988-89 £	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £
Alyn and Deeside	15·15	16·11	19·27	20·72
Colwyn	19·74	21·69	23·19	24·94
Delyn	20·25	22·24	23·41	25·08
Glyndwr	18·42	19·38	21·89	23·40
Rhuddlan	16·27	18·32	18·73	20·76
Wrexham Maelor	13·56	15·29	18·44	20·10
Carmarthen	20·61	22·06	22·96	25·24
Ceredigion	21·05	21·60	24·17	26·39
Dinefwr	18·59	18·30	19·73	21·71
Llanelli	19·62	21·00	24·40	27·66
Preseli Pembrokeshire	17·48	18·40	20·97	23·72
South Pembrokeshire	20·66	20·73	23·08	25·51
Blaenau Gwent	25·84	25·24	26·65	29·20
Islwyn	19·40	21·35	24·82	27·77
Monmouth	22·96	23·94	26·83	27·99
Newport	21·67	22·86	25·82	28·94
Torfaen	20·96	23·16	26·62	31·48
Aberconwy	20·13	21·47	23·80	26·08
Arfon	16·75	19·35	22·15	23·15
Dwyfor	16·09	18·09	21·05	23·12
Meirionnydd	20·20	22·75	23·39	25·89
Ynys Môn	18·10	22·96	24·16	26·42
Cynon Valley	21·56	22·49	24·48	26·48
Merthyr Tydfil	20·30	21·78	22·44	23·92
Ogwr	24·12	26·07	24·80	26·04
Rhondda	23·94	26·94	27·57	28·95
Rhymney Valley	22·62	24·94	28·38	30·23
Taff Ely	21·07	21·34	25·36	27·31
Brecknock	20·70	23·95	22·58	24·43
Montgomeryshire	19·10	20·69	23·15	26·16
Radnorshire	20·10	20·97	24·68	27·74
Cardiff	23·77	26·43	26·63	28·57
Vale of Glamorgan	18·86	20·44	23·61	25·09
Lliw Valley	21·57	23·52	24·30	26·36
Neath	18·87	21·65	24·12	27·22
Port Talbot	20·98	21·35	26·06	29·36
Swansea	18·61	18·33	24·62	28·30

[1] The estimates of rent are taken from local authority returns and are based on a 52 week payment year.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much has been paid by each district council to his Department in uniform business rate; how much was redistributed to each district council in the last financial year; and if he will publish estimated figures for 1992-93.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The contributions of district councils in Wales to the non-domestic rate pool in 1990-91 and 1991-92, together with the entitlement of each district and county authority from the pool for those years are set out in the table. Details for 1992-93 are not yet available. Contributions by district authorities in respect of 1990-91 will be adjusted shortly to take account of certified outturn figures.

	1990-91		1991-92	
	Contribution to NDR pool (£)	Share of NDR pool (£)	Contribution to NDR pool (£)	Share of NDR pool (£)
Alyn and Deeside	12,365,370	1,799,111	14,209,271	2,243,128
Colwyn	4,408,730	1,434,175	5,415,994	1,730,305
Delyn	5,902,584	1,646,106	7,194,099	2,038,015
Glyndwr	3,560,390	1,066,995	4,336,068	1,316,435
Rhuddlan	7,052,103	1,427,350	8,121,768	1,781,702
Wrexham Maelor	17,119,685	2,892,510	17,840,200	3,535,643
Clwyd CC	—	54,631,926	—	63,411,355
Carmarthen	4,761,327	1,399,793	6,255,179	1,700,422
Ceredigion	4,470,789	1,578,656	5,369,351	2,043,882
Dinefwr	2,378,428	961,446	2,824,987	1,182,767
Lanelli	7,741,743	1,868,612	9,688,419	2,358,999
Preseli Pembs	8,201,944	1,718,363	9,409,643	2,137,568
South Pembrokeshire	7,852,064	1,048,827	8,277,573	1,306,511
Dyfed CC	—	45,653,651	—	53,807,913
Blaenau Gwent	7,052,756	1,899,886	7,683,509	2,352,456
Islwyn	4,658,334	1,615,281	5,114,882	2,030,590
Monmouth	8,206,221	1,921,419	10,609,761	2,366,561

	1990-91		1991-92	
	Contribution to NDR pool (£)	Share of NDR pool (£)	Contribution to NDR pool (£)	Share of NDR pool (£)
Newport	27,283,928	3,242,065	31,898,599	4,059,624
Torfaen	12,450,141	2,210,093	12,598,816	2,746,707
Gwent CC	—	57,944,549	—	67,978,245
Aberconwy	6,268,406	1,352,626	7,572,061	1,680,351
Arfon	5,569,756	1,347,210	7,129,976	1,677,457
Dwyfor	3,228,889	773,098	3,517,601	935,326
Meirionnydd	2,933,595	937,318	3,233,177	1,131,262
Yns Môn	6,051,627	1,653,957	6,453,772	2,121,945
Gwynedd CC	—	32,270,744	—	37,842,234
Cynon Valley	5,261,349	1,608,007	6,104,420	2,001,294
Merthyr Tydfil	6,369,338	1,414,212	7,393,028	1,802,069
Ogwr	14,736,142	3,343,193	16,089,657	4,129,582
Rhondda	4,606,327	1,932,890	4,895,082	2,412,902
Rhymney Valley	9,385,546	2,472,460	10,653,628	3,093,501
Taff Ely	15,036,264	2,273,538	16,305,221	2,864,436
Mid Glamorgan CC	—	69,415,359	—	81,757,722
Brecknock	2,782,861	1,047,353	3,518,461	1,286,264
Montgomery	4,930,857	1,332,599	5,661,107	1,664,720
Radnor	1,733,759	588,659	2,256,968	742,559
Powys CC	—	15,797,494	—	18,521,814
Cardiff	47,351,346	6,806,033	59,846,263	8,428,518
Vale of Glamorgan	10,498,606	2,691,441	13,181,039	3,382,507
South Glamorgan CC	—	50,540,896	—	59,228,125
Port Talbot	17,433,676	1,281,426	16,565,738	1,569,739
Lliw Valley	5,632,942	1,521,748	6,137,454	1,903,168
Neath	8,441,107	1,620,888	9,394,194	2,014,473
Swansea	25,123,939	4,348,858	31,780,676	5,513,528
West Glamorgan CC	—	46,685,179	—	55,165,676

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was allocated for each district council in Wales in other services capital receipts budgets in each year from 1988; and what are the estimated allocations for 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Prior to 1990-91 the capital receipts of individual local authorities were not taken into account in the distribution of capital resources. For each district council, the non-housing services capital receipts taken into account in setting its basic credit approvals are given as follows for 1990-91 and 1991-92. These figures reflect only a portion of the resources which authorities have at their disposal for financing capital expenditure.

Non-housing receipts taken into account

(£ thousands)

	1990-91	1991-92
Alyn and Deeside	23	11
Colwyn	6	34
Delyn	10	315
Glyndwr	31	10
Rhuddlan	4	0
Wrexham Maelor	14	209
Carmarthen	276	75
Ceredigion	293	30
Dinefwr	79	19
Llanelli	214	59
Preseli Pembrokeshire	257	86
South Pembrokeshire	62	28
Blaenau Gwent	75	53
Islwyn	128	81
Monmouth	14	41
Newport	1,057	19
Torfaen	456	153
Aberconwy	208	30
Arfon	223	0
Dwyfor	9	3
Meirionnydd	114	0
Ynys Mon	254	12
Cynon Valley	0	11
Merthyr Tydfil	1	155
Ogwr	202	95
Rhondda	0	31
Rhymney Valley	26	43
Taff-Ely	51	13
Brecknock	7	45
Montgomeryshire	31	1
Radnorshire	16	0
Cardiff	861	423
Vale of Glamorgan	277	61
Port Talbot	16	3
Lliw Valley	153	25
Neath	26	289
Swansea	1,824	756
Total districts	7,293	3,218

Second Homes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to how many second homes there are in *(a)* each parliamentary constituency in Wales and *(b)* each district authority area; and what proportion of the housing stock is represented by second homes in each instance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Estimates of the number of second homes alone are not available. However estimates of the number of second/holiday homes are available for each parliamentary constituency and each district in Wales

from the 1981 census of population and the Welsh inter-censal survey, 1986 respectively. These figures are given in the tables:

a. Second/holiday homes 1981, by Parliamentary Constituency

Constituency[1]	Household spaces: second residence and holiday accommodation (unoccupied at Census)	Percentage of total household spaces
Aberavon	17	0·1
Alyn and Deeside	67	0·2
Blaenau Gwent	24	0·1
Brecon and Radnor	892	3·5
Bridgend	141	0·5
Caernarfon	3,299	12·5
Caerphilly	23	0·1
Carmarthen	805	2·4
Cardiff Central	26	0·1
Cardiff North	6	0·0
Cardiff South and Penarth	5	0·0
Cardiff West	15	0·1
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	2,692	8·1
Clwyd North West	1,157	3·4
Clwyd South West	962	3·2
Conwy	1,717	6·0
Cynon Valley	36	0·1
Delyn	541	1·7
Gower	566	2·0
Islwyn	18	0·1
Llanelli	81	0·2
Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	3,492	17·5
Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney	26	0·1
Monmouth	231	0·8
Montgomery	907	4·5
Neath	53	0·2
Newport East	19	0·1
Newport West	20	0·1
Ogmore	15	0·1
Pembroke	2,521	6·7
Pontypridd	17	0·1
Rhondda	16	0·1
Swansea East	13	0·1
Swansea West	47	0·2
Torfaen	33	0·1
Vale of Glamorgan	46	0·1
Wrexham	72	0·2
Ynys Môn	1,997	7·0

[1] Boundaries as at March 1983.
Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

b. Second and holiday homes 1986, by district

	Number of second and holiday homes	Second and holiday homes as a percentage of district stock[1]
Aberconwy	2,040	9
Alyn and Deeside	50	—
Arfon	1,380	6
Blaenau Gwent	50	—
Brecknock	650	4
Cardiff	50	—
Carmarthen	490	2
Ceredigion	1,570	6
Colwyn	960	4
Cynon Valley	70	—
Delyn	280	1
Dinefwr	290	2
Dwyfor	2,860	21
Glyndŵr	690	4
Islwyn	20	—
Llanelli	120	—
Lliw Valley	70	—
Meirionnydd	3,200	20
Merthyr Tydfil	0	—
Monmouth	130	—
Montgomeryshire	1,040	5
Neath	0	—
Newport	100	—
Ogwr	50	—
Port Talbot (Afan)	40	—
Preseli	1,950	7
Radnor	410	4
Rhondda	20	—
Rhuddlan	480	2
Rhymney Valley	20	—
South Pembrokeshire	1,510	9
Swansea	460	1
Taff-Ely	100	—
Torfaen	80	—
Vale of Glamorgan	260	1
Wrexham Maelor	100	—
Ynys Môn	1,760	6
Wales	23,340	2

[1] Indicates 0·5 per cent. or less.
Source: Welsh Inter Censal Survey, 1986.

Energy Production

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation has been undertaken by his Department on the potential impact of the European Community large combustion plant directive on energy production in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: None. The United Kingdom's national plan, which incorporates the programme for achieving the stepped reductions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions as required by the EC large combustion plant directive from existing plant, allocates reduction targets to England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland on sectoral and, for electricity, company bases. Figures for Wales are not listed separately.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department has undertaken any study as to the effect of holiday housing developments on the Welsh language in the surrounding localities; and what evidence he has indicating the causes of any decline in Welsh language speakers.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The results of the 1991 census will provide information on the effects of migration on the rural population of Wales and on the number of Welsh speakers.

Point of Ayr Colliery

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of the research work into coal liquefaction at the Point of Ayr colliery.

Mr. David Hunt: Commissioning of the coal liquefaction plant has been successfully accomplished and an 18-month operating project has begun. It is too soon to assess results, but I understand that encouraging technical progress is being made.

Immigration

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to publish data showing *(a)* the volume of in-migration into Welsh counties and districts and *(b)* the age structure of the inward-migrating population; and if he has any plans to conduct a survey to ascertain the reasons for inward-migration into Wales and its effect on the indigenous population.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Data on in and out migration, based on the re-registration of NHS general practitioners' patients and by broad age groups, are published at a county level by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in table 5.1 of "Key Population and Vital Statistics" annual series VS/PP1. The OPCS also produces estimates of net migration for counties and county districts and publish these in table 4 of the OPCS monitor series PP1. Both are available in the Library of the House.

Information on the scale, origin, destination and characteristics of migration flows for the year prior to the 1991 census will become available over the next year when the full processing of the census returns has been completed.

Waste Disposal Sites

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of derelict land in Wales is accounted for by *(a)* abandoned mines and quarries, *(b)* mineral waste tips and *(c)* old waste disposal sites.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: A total of 55 to 60 per cent. of derelict land in Wales is accounted for by abandoned mines and quarries and about 15 per cent. by mineral waste tips. Details of old waste disposal sites are not maintained centrally.

Joint Replacement Surgery

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for the period 1 January to 31 March the number of patients who will have major joint replacement surgery carried out at the Prince of Wales Orthopaedic hospital, Rhydlafar, Cardiff, on a contractual basis with his Department in its role as a treatment centre.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department contracts with the treatment centres on a financial year basis. In the current year the orthopaedic treatment centre at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar is contracted to perform 250 major joint replacement operations and 40 other minor procedures. The centre is on course to meet this target.

Cataract Operations

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for the period 1 January to 31 March the number of cataract operations his Department has contracted with Ysbyty Gwynedd and the Bridgend general hospital treatment centres to be carried out.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Department contracts with the treatment centres on a financial year basis. In the current financial year the ophthalmic treatment centre at Bridgend general hospital is contracted to perform 275 cataract and 25 other operations and the treatment centre at Ysbyty Gwynedd is contracted for 450 cataract and 50 other operations. Both centres are on course to meet their targets.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many patients from each Welsh health authority have been treated for cataract removal at the new Bridgend treatment centre since its opening; and how many have been referred to the centre by each authority.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of patients treated in the three months to December 1991 was as follows:

	Number
Mid Glamorgan	98
West Glamorgan	56
South Glamorgan	11
East Dyfed	11
Gwent	5
Powys	1

On 17 January the number of patients scheduled for admission before the end of the financial year was as follows:

	Number
Mid Glamorgan	37
West Glamorgan	39
South Glamorgan	31
East Dyfed	17
Gwent	4
Powys	2

Limestone Pavement

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many areas of limestone pavement have been notified for protection in Wales; how many have had orders made; and when limestone pavement protection will be complete in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There are 10 known sites of limestone pavement in Wales. They are all protected as parts of sites of special scientific interest. As the sites are relatively small and not under threat, the Secretary of State does not propose to make any limestone pavement orders at present.

TRANSPORT

Coastguard

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give details of surveys undertaken during the review of the coastguard service before drawing up the proposals contained in the current consultation paper.

Mr. McLoughlin: All levels of staff within the six regions of HM coastguard from auxiliary coastguards to district management teams were consulted over the recommendations made by the sector review, and were asked for comment. The views and opinions received were duly considered before the final regional implementation plans were submitted to coastguard headquarters. The views and opinions of a large number of other organisations, local authorities and members of the public were also received and considered.

The sector review document has been available in the library of the House of Commons since March 1991. Various representations have been made by hon. Members, although none, until now, by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that coastguard auxiliaries are not penalised in any way for speaking against the proposals contained in the coastguard review consultation document.

Mr. McLoughlin: Auxiliary coastguards are volunteers, not employees of the Department. When engaged on coastguard business they are afforded the same treatment as regular coastguard officers. While they are not under obligation to do so, they would be expected to communicate matters of concern through their immediate line management in the normal way. Auxiliary coastguards are, of course, free to make representations to their Members of Parliament in the usual way.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will specify the consultations, including dates of any meetings and correspondence, which took place on the north coast of Scotland on the review of Her Majesty's coastguard sector organisation, with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* coastguard staff and *(c)* the public.

Mr. McLoughlin: All coastguard district management teams and sector officers within Aberdeen region, including the north coast of Scotland, were consulted personally by regional management over the sector review during the consultative period lasting from February to June 1991. Consultations were numerous, and all views of the coastguard staff so aired were considered.

Since this was an internal review local authorities and the public were not directly approached until the review recommendations were announced in the House.

Hon. Members representing constituencies on the north coast of Scotland have had access to the sector review document, which was placed in the House of Commons Library in March 1991.

Oxleas Wood

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last visited Oxleas wood, south-east London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I have not visited the site, although my right hon. and learned Friend has. I accept that many people are very concerned about the effect of the east London river crossing on Oxleas wood, but no new evidence has come forward to cause the decision that was taken in 1988 to be changed.

Red Route Network

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will publish details of the proposed red route network in London.

Mr. Rifkind: I have issued today a consultation document setting out the Government's proposals for the composition of the red route network in London. Copies are available in the Library. The period of consultation runs until 31 March.

A38

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he hopes to announce the alternative routes for the proposed improvement of the A38 trunk road between Saltash and Trerulefoot; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* I am planning to consult the public on proposals for the Saltash to Trerulefoot section of the A38 later this year and to announce a preferred route for the scheme once public views have been considered.

THE ARTS

Slaithwaite Philharmonic Orchestra

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he has any plans to visit the Slaithwaite philharmonic orchestra in recognition of the orchestra's celebration of its centenary.

Mr. Renton: I am sorry not to be able to attend the concerts on 25 January and 28 March, but I have sent a greetings message to the orchestra and am delighted that it has been included in their excellent centenary publication alongside messages from others, including my hon. Friend.

The orchestra is to be congratulated in securing the services of distinguished soloists, like the Tchaikovsky competition winner, Peter Donohoe, for its centenary concerts.

I wish it as much success in its next hundred years as it has achieved in its first.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Stamp Duty

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to arrange for the Inland Revenue not to charge stamp duty on assumed value added tax on rent on leases.

Mr. Maude: No; the stamp duty charge on prospective VAT on rent, under a lease of non-domestic property, reflects legal advice given to the Inland Revenue. Where a landlord agrees in advance not to exercise his option to levy VAT, this stamp duty charge does not arise.

Exchange Rate Mechanism

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes in exchange rate relative to *(a)* the deutschmark and *(b)* the ecu allowed to each member of the exchange rate mechanism subsequent to entry giving the date and in each case the relative appreciation or depreciation.

Mr. Maples: The table gives the central rates of currencies on joining the ERM, against the deutschmark and the ECU. For each realignment it gives the date of realignment, the currencies involved, the percentage changes in the central rates of those currencies relative to other currencies, and the new central rates against the deutschmark and the ECU.

ERM Realignments to the present date

Date and currencies	*Central rate against DM (1 DM =)*	*ECU parity (1 ECU =)*
13 March 1979 (starting date)		
Belgian Franc (BFC)	15·716400	39·456200
French Franc (FFC)	2·309500	5·798310
Italian Lire (LIT)	457·314000	1148·150000
Dutch Guilder (DFL)	1·083700	2·720770
Deutschemark (DM)	—	2·510640
Danish Kroner (DKR)	2·822370	7·085920
Irish Punt (IPT)	0·263932	0·662638
24 September 1979: DM +2 per cent.; DKR −2·9 per cent.		
DM	—	2·485570
DKR	2·963480	7·365930
3 December 1979: DKR −4·76 per cent.		
DKR	3·111650	7·723360
23 March 1981: LIT −6 per cent.		
LIT	496·232000	1262·920000
5 October 1981: DM, DFL +5·5 per cent.; FFC, LIT −3 per cent.		
DM	—	2·049890
DFL	1·105370	2·663820
FFC	2·562120	6·174430
LIT	539·722000	1300·670000
22 February 1982: BFC −8·5 per cent.; DKR −3 per cent.		
BFC	18·48370	44·696300
DKR	3·384330	8·183820
14 June 1982: DM, DFL +4·25 per cent.; LIT, FFC −2·75 per cent.		
DM	—	2·333790
DFL	1·105370	2·579710
LIT	578·57400	1350·270000
FFC	2·833960	6·613870
22 March 1983: DM +5·5 per cent.; DFL +3·5 per cent.; DKR +2·5 per cent.; BFC +1·5 per cent.; FFC, LIT −2·5 per cent.; IPT −3·5 per cent.		
DM	—	2·215150
DFL	1·126730	2·495870
DKR	3·631410	8·044120
BFC	20·028500	44·366200
FFC	3·066480	6·792710
LIT	626·043000	1386·780000
IPT	0·323703	0·717050
22 July 1985: DM, DFL, DKR, BFC, IPT, FFC +2 per cent.; LIT −6 per cent.		
BFC	20·0285	44·832000
DKR	3·631410	8·128570
DM	—	2·238400
FFC	3·066480	6·864020
IPT	0·323703	0·724578
DFL	1·126730	2·522080
LIT	679·325000	1520·600000
7 April 1986: DM, DFL +3 per cent.; BFC, DKR +1 per cent.; FFC −3 per cent.		
DM	—	2·138340
DFL	1·126730	2·409350
BFC	20·425200	43·676100
DKR	3·703320	7·918900
FFC	3·256170	6·962800
4 August 1986: IPT −8 per cent.		
IPT	0·362405	0·764976
12 January 1987: DM, DFL +3 per cent.; BFC +2 per cent.		
DM	—	2·058530
DFL	1·126730	2·319430
BFC	20·625500	42·458200
10 June 1989: Entry of Spanish Peseta		
PTA	65·000000	133·804000

Date and currencies	Central rate against DM (1 DM =)	ECU parity (1 ECU =)
8 January 1990: LIT adoption of narrow band and −3·7 per cent.		
LIT	748·217000	1529·700000
8 October 1990: Entry of pound sterling		
GBP	0·338984	0·696904

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the valuation in real terms of each currency in the exchange rate mechanism against the deutschmark at the present date compared to the last quarter of 1986.

Mr. Maples: The table gives the estimated real exchange rate at the close of trading on 14 January 1992, for each currency in the ERM, expressed as a percentage of the rate for the last quarter of 1986. The rates have been calculated by comparing movements in the GDP deflator for Germany with those for other ERM members over the period specified in the question, and the movement in exchange rates between the deutschmark and the other currencies.

It should be noted that the results produced by comparisons of this kind depend crucially on the choice of base period, in this case the last quarter of 1986 at which time the sterling exchange rate index was at its lowest since 1975.

Country	Real exchange rate against deutschmark at 1986 Q4 = 100
United Kingdom £	122·5
France Franc	98·5
Italy Lira	110·6
Belgium/Luxembourg Franc	105·2
Netherlands Guilder	97·5
Denmark Kroner	104·6
Spain Peseta	127·6
Irish £	102·2

ENERGY

Anthracite

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the demand for anthracite in the United Kingdom until 2000.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department does not produce forecasts of the future demand for anthracite.

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department was advised by the Coopers and Lybrand group in connection with the sales of the 12 regional electricity companies and the two generating companies in England and Wales. Fees paid to individual advisers are commercially confidential.

River Wyre Barrage

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what is the estimated cost of building the proposed barrage across the River Wyre; and what would be the value of the electricity produced by it;

(2) what public access there will be to the proposed barrage across the River Wyre;

(3) what will be the generating capacity of the proposed barrage across the River Wyre;

(4) what effects on the surrounding landscape he expects the cables with pylons etc. emanating from the proposed barrage across the River Wyre to have;

(5) what safeguards will be built into the proposed barrage across the River Wyre to ensure that large floating objects do not damage the turbines;

(6) what effects on migrating fish he expects the proposed barrage across the River Wyre to have.

Mr. Moynihan: The report detailing the findings of the pre-feasibility study into a possible Wyre barrage has been released today. A copy has been placed in the Library. The study estimates that the cost of the barrage, having a generating capacity of 63·6MW, would be £90 million—1991 prices—and could provide 131 GWh/y of electricity at a cost of 6·49p/kWh assuming an 8 per cent. discount rate. The study includes the construction of a 9 m wide promenade across the barrage, and considers the use of the barrage as a road crossing. If built, electricity cables from a Wyre barrage should have no effect on the surrounding landscape, as it is anticipated that cables connecting the barrage to the nearby existing electricity substation would be underground. Consideration of the protection of barrage turbines from large objects would need to form part of a more detailed design study. At this stage it is thought that a "trash" screen would provide sufficient protection. Two fish passes are included in the outline design of the Wyre barrage to provide passage for migrating fish, and these are detailed in the report. The report finds that further work is required to more fully assess the impact of a barrage on migrating fish.

Petroleum Engineering Directorate

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the timescale set for completion of the consultants' report commissioned by his Department into the cost-effectiveness of relocating the petroleum engineering directorate to Aberdeen; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have agreed that there will be a thorough review of all the issues relating to this matter. My Department will be interviewing the shortlisted consultants in the near future. It is not possible to indicate how long the study will take until the competition has been completed and the programme discussed with the firm appointed.

Offshore Oil Industry

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he has taken to monitor and encourage implementation of the memorandum of undertaking on recognition and access in the offshore oil industry.

Mr. Moynihan: The memorandum of understanding on trade union access to offshore installations provides the framework within which visits are facilitated. When considering applications for licences to explore and produce oil and gas on the United Kingdom continental shelf, my Department takes into account whether potential licensees agree to subscribe to the terms of the memorandum of understanding. All current operators have agreed to do so.

The first paragraph of the memorandum of understanding, which refers to trade union recognition, is not operative because the relevant provisions of the Employment Protection Act, 1975 were repealed by the Employment Act 1980.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action has been undertaken by his Department to promote the use of colliery spoil, slate waste, power station ash and slag as substitute materials.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are fully committed to the use of these materials as alternatives to primary aggregates. A report commissioned by the Department of the Environment into the "Occurrence and Utilisation of Mineral and Construction Wastes", was published in 1991. This showed major supplies of these wastes were available for use as construction aggregates and recommended how usage could be increased. The Government are actively examining these ideas and will make an announcement later this year.

PRIME MINISTER

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Prime Minister if he will support a United Nations Commission to East Timor to investigate the killings in Santa Cruz on 12 November 1991.

The Prime Minister: We support the UN Secretary-General's proposal to send a representative to examine the situation in East Timor.

Severely Disabled People (Personal Assistants)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister if he is satisfied with the co-ordination between the Secretaries of State for Health and for Social Security concerning policy towards direct payments to severely disabled people to employ their own personal assistants; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Armed Forces (Liability to Injury) Bill

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Prime Minister what is his policy with regard to the Armed Forces (Liability to Injury) Bill.

The Prime Minister: As the Armed Forces (Liability to Injury) Bill will not receive its Second Reading until Friday 24 January 1992, it would not be appropriate for me to make a statement.

British Steel

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings he has had with British Steel in the last six months; and on what dates.

The Prime Minister: None, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had four meetings with British Steel during the last six months.

HEALTH

NHS Supply Centres

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from the British Surgical Trades Association, or from individual members of the medical supply industry about unfair competition from the national health service supply centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a number of representations from trade associations, wholesalers and manufacturers alleging unfair terms of trading by individual health authorities selling on a proportion of their supplies to non-NHS bodies. Most of the representations arose prior to the issue of new guidelines on resale of goods to non-NHS organisations to all health authority general managers in March 1991. The aim of the guidelines is to ensure fair competition without damage to the NHS, and the NHS management executive has asked the NHS supplies authority to continue to monitor NHS activity in this area.

Walton Hospital

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra funding has been sought to cover redundancy payments at Walton hospital in connection with its planned entry into the Aintree hospitals trust.

Mr. Dorrell: I am advised that there are no planned redundancies at Walton hospital.

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Dorrell: A list of projects using Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte since 1989 and their purpose is shown in the table.

The total value of the consultancy contracts listed amount to £3,683,703. The cost of the individual contracts is subject to commercial confidentiality.

Project title	Purpose
Health Service Indicators—Expert Systems.	To carry out the development and integration of knowledge bases.
Cancer Screening Evaluation.	To test and carry out a number of enhancements to the Cancer Screening Evaluation Model.
Expert System for Personal Social Service Indicators	To develop knowledge bases for the home and residential based care of the elderly.
Assistance with System Dynamics and Review of Waiting Lists.	To conduct a review of the System Dynamics Model of regional waiting list behaviour.
Family Health Service Expert Systems.	To amend the Expert System for the family Health Service.
DISS Call Off	To assist in the development of a District Information Support System (DISS) in respect of internal contracting.
Billing and Invoice Study (DISS).	Report on Billing and Invoicing as per "Working For Patients".
West Midlands Bridging System. Stage II (DISS).	Developing and implementing application software for the invoice processing and contract management modules of DISS in West Midlands Region
NHS Administrative Register—Phase II and III	Development of a user and operational requirement for an administrative register for the NHS
DISP (Developing Information Systems for Purchasers).	Strategy and project management of development of DISP.
Investment Appraisal	To determine what methodology to use in the revised Investment Appraisal guidance.
Computerised MDS for A & E Departments.	Pilot trial to test 3 systems for their suitability
Strategy Development.	Assist in the development of an IS Strategy for the NHS
DISS Study.	Scoping study for District Information Support Systems.
HSI Database.	Implementation of Health Service Indicators Database on Oracle.
DISS Project.	Professional services in connection with the DISS project.
HSI Development.	Development of the HSI package.
NHS Edifact.	Evaluation/advice on the Data Interchange Standards.
Date Interchange Standards.	Intermediate formats for DIS.
Bridging DISS.	Provision of Help Desk for users of "Bridging DISS" software.
Date Encryption.	Scoping study for the encryption of minimum data sets.
HSI Analysis.	Analysis and interpretation of 1989-90 Purchaser Indicators.
Hospital Cost Arrangements.	Procedures and systems.
Pricing in Two Hospitals.	Development work.
Review of Drugs Expenditure.	Forecasting models.
NHS Trusts.	Leadership issues.
COMATAS.	Review of promotions within the tobacco industry.
NHS Personnel.	Measuring effectiveness.
First Wave NHS Trusts.	Financial and information systems.
Second Wave NHS Trusts.	Financial and information systems.
DISP Project.	Technical author.
DH Central Accounting and Monitoring Systems Project.	Project to carry out a feasibility study on the setting up of a computerised central accounting and monitoring system for DH.
Reviewing Financial Activities Project.	Project to review the sufficiency of IDC's current financial activities, identify functions required and make recommendations on adequacy of procedures.
GMSO1 Project.	Project for collating information in relation to the DH's GP Fund-holder Initiative.
OIS Project.	Project for implementing Office Information Strategy.
The PHS9102 Project.	Project to improve DH/PSNC information on recruitment, retention and motivation of community pharmacist as an input to annual pay negotiations.

Doncaster Health Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the salary payable to each of the members of the Doncaster health authority and the Doncaster family health services authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Non-executive members of district health and family health services authorities are not paid salaries, but are remunerated in recognition of their contribution to the NHS. Remuneration currently stands at £5,000 per annum. Information about the salaries paid to executive members is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. G. Smith, the chairman of Doncaster health authority and Mr. K. Jones, the chairman of Doncaster family health services authority, for details.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public meetings NHS trusts are required to hold each year; what form such meetings should take; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Each NHS trust is required to hold an annual public meeting, except in the first year of operation, to present its annual report, audited annual accounts and any report made on those accounts by the auditor. An additional public meeting must be called if the auditors make a report during the course of the audit which they consider should be brought to the attention of the public.

Public Health Laboratory Service

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many samples were tested by the Public Health Laboratory Service on behalf of local authorities in each year since 1988; and if he will state the charging policy of his Department for this work together with the scale of charges.

Mr. Dorrell: The Public Health Laboratory Service tested the following number of samples collected by local authorities:

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
England	318,027	320,434	309,905
Wales	29,149	24,419	22,697
Total	347,176	344,853	332,602

In future the Public Health Laboratory Service, like health authorities, will provide services under contract to those who require them. The way in which this general principle will apply to services provided to local authorities is still under discussion.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of food poisoning have been notified in each year since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The total number of cases of food poisoning notified to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys for England and Wales, since 1980 is as follows:

Year	*Total cases*
1980	10,318
1981	9,936
1982	14,253
1983	17,735
1984	20,702
1985	19,242
1986	23,948
1987	29,331
1988	39,713
1989	52,557
1990	52,145
1991	[1]53,881

[1] Provisional.

Secure Places (Children)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many local authority secure places for children are available in each of the standard regions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: On 1 January 1992 there were 295 approved local authority secure places for children in England. These were split between regions as shown in the table.

	Number of places			
Region	*Boys*	*Girls*	*Mixed*	*Total*
Northern	—	—	55	55
Yorkshire and Humberside	27	—	9	36
North Western	45	13	6	64
West Midlands	—	—	8	8
East Midlands	—	—	19	19
Thames/Anglia	3	6	—	9
London	38	12	—	50
Southern	8	3	11	22
South Western	20	—	12	32
Totals	141	34	120	295

Toxoplasmosis

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated cost of toxoplasmosis disabilities to the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The cost has not been estimated. It would be difficult to disaggregate the cost of toxoplasmosis from other costs involved in health care activities.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities in England provide *(a)* information on infectious disease during pregnancy and *(b)* specific information about the prevention of toxoplasmosis to pregnant women; which health authorities routinely test pregnant women for toxoplasmosis; which test pregnant women on demand for toxoplasmosis; and if he will require those authorities which do not screen to do so.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All pregnant women seen at antenatal clinics receive a copy of the Department of Health's leaflet entitled "While you are Pregnant" and also a copy of the Health Education Authority's pregnancy book, both of which provide advice on the dangers of toxoplasmosis, and other infections, and on how to avoid catching this infection. Copies of both booklets are available in the Library.

Health authorities do not routinely offer antenatal tests for toxoplasmosis. It is not known how many offer such a test on demand.

We have no plans to introduce screening of pregnant women for toxoplasmosis. The Department keeps this policy under review, and has sought the advice of experts. Their view is that there is no available evidence that the benefits conferred by screening clearly outweigh any risks involved.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of the screening blood test for toxoplasmosis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The most commonly used screen for toxoplasmosis is the latex agglutination test. The cost of purchasing a commercial kit for this test is of the order of £35 per 20 tests; this cost does not take account of clinic, transport, laboratory and reporting costs. Should this test give a positive result there is then a need for confirmatory testing. Additional costs for such confirmatory testing could be of the order of £20 per patient.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action the Government are taking to improve the knowledge of health professionals, and especially general practitioners and midwives, about the prevention, treatment and diagnosis of toxoplasmosis;

(2) if he will implement a campaign to educate pregnant women and their health carers about toxoplasmosis and its prevention in England;

(3) if he will conduct a survey into the amount and quality of counselling provided in each health authority to pregnant women infected with toxoplasmosis;

(4) what information his Department has provided to general practitioners regarding the implications of a toxoplasmosis infection for pregnant women.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department recently published a new leaflet designed to encourage pregnant women to take precautions when handling and consuming food and to ensure safe contact with animals. The leaflet entitled "While you are pregnant: safe eating and how to avoid infection from food and animals" gives advice on toxoplasmosis and other infections. Women will be given copies as soon as their pregnancy is confirmed. The leaflet is available from antenatal clinics, maternity units and GP practices. Doctors and midwives may also give the leaflet to women who are planning to become mothers. Copies of the leaflet are available in the Library.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has convened a working party which includes representatives from other Royal Colleges and professional associations, and which will be producing guidance on toxoplasmosis for professionals. We have no intention therefore to conduct a survey into existing counselling activities within health authorities.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of women who suffer an infection of toxoplasmosis during pregnancy and *(b)* the number of of babies born with an infection of toxoplasmosis; and on what information these estimates are based.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A recent review of studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s in a number of localities suggested an incidence of toxoplasmosis infection in two of every 1,000 pregnancies. However, this information may not apply nationally in the 1990s: there has been some evidence from Britain and Europe that there may be a downward trend in the incidence of toxoplasmosis in the population generally. A review by the Public Health Laboratory Service of laboratory reports for 1988 identified 13 possible cases of congenital toxoplasmosis in new born babies. A PHLS/British paediatric surveillance unit study between June 1989 and May 1990 suggests that approximately 14 babies present in the first year of life with symptomatic congenital toxoplasmosis. The number of asymptomatic infants with congenital toxoplasmosis born each year is unknown at present.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the disabilities known to occur, either immediately or at some later stage of life, in babies born with a toxoplasmosis infection.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In most healthy individuals newly acquired toxoplasmosis infection is asymptomatic or presents with non-specific signs or symptoms. When acquired in pregnancy, toxoplasmosis can cause fetal infection. In most cases the condition is not severe, but in rare instances it can cause potentially serious damage to the newborn infant. Such damage can range from hydrocephalus, severely impaired vision and neurological impairment, to small size for gestational age, deafness, epilepsy and physical disability.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total expenditure on health education regarding toxoplasmosis; and if he will give a breakdown of the expenditure.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department produces the booklet "While you are Pregnant" and the Health Education Authority produces the pregnancy book, copies of which are available in the Library, both of which are given to women attending on their first visit to an antenatal clinic. Both publications contain guidance on how to avoid toxoplasmosis. Advice from doctors and nurses is available to women at the GP's surgery and at antenatal clinics where posters about toxoplasmosis are displayed. It is not possible to disaggregate costs associated with health education regarding toxoplasmosis from other health education costs.

The Department also funds the Toxoplasmosis Trust for its activities in advising the public on the risks associated with the disease. The sum of £10,000 has been granted to the trust in each of the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has for a multi-centred study to examine the rates of pre-pregnancy immunity to toxoplasmosis, the prevalence of sero-conversion during pregnancy, and the numbers of babies born infected each year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on how many severely affected infants are born each year in this country is being gathered under the British Paediatric Association surveillance scheme. Consideration is also being given to priorities for research or screening for a variety of conditions including toxoplasmosis. There are no plans at present to start any other surveys or information collection exercises.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research into toxoplasmosis is supported by his Department; and what financial support is provided by his Department to the Toxoplasmosis Trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science. The Public Health Laboratory Service, which is funded by the Department of Health, is conducting research to improve tests for the diagnosis of toxoplasmosis infection.

The Toxoplasmosis Trust has been awarded a grant by the Department of Health of £10,000 per annum for 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94.

Nurse Prescribing

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the findings of the independent report on nurse prescribing.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) on 21 January at columns *173-74*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Least-Developed Countries

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what targets the Government agreed to meet in the programme of action for the least-developed countries; and what progress has been made in achieving them.

Mrs. Chalker: In the programme of action adopted by the United Nations conference on the least-developed countries in September 1990, no single new target was established for official development assistance to least-developed countries, as a percentage of GNP. The United Kingdom, along with several other donors, undertook to make best efforts to reach the existing United Nations target of 0·15 per cent. Data required to measure progress since the conference are not yet available.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Government's aid programme has been altered in light of the agreements reached at the second United Nations conference on the least-developed countries in 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: As a signatory to the declaration and programme of action agreed at the United Nations conference on the least-developed countries, in September 1990, we have taken full account of the elements of the programme of action in our strategy for British aid. The emphasis placed in the programme on sound economic policies, environment, population, education and training particularly reflects our own thinking. Specific British initiatives on aid tying and local costs were announced at the conference, both of direct benefit to the least developed, and these have been put into effect.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the percentage of aid allocated to the least-developed countries as a percentge of gross national product between 1981 and the latest available figures.

Mrs. Chalker: United Kingdom aid to the least-developed countries from 1981 onwards, as a percentage of GNP, were as follows, OECD figures except 1985:

Year	*Percentage*
1981	0·12
1982	0·11
1983	0·10
1984	0·09
1985	[1]0·11
1986	0·08
1987	0·09
1988	0·10
1989	[2]0·09
1990	[3]—

[1] estimate
[2] revised
[3] Not yet available

Mrs Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the relative priority of the elements of the programme of action for the least-developed countries in enabling the least-developed countries alleviate poverty and promote development.

Mrs. Chalker: The basic principles of the programme of action, agreed at the second United Nations conference on the least-developed countries, made it clear that the relative priority to be given to the elements of the action programme depend on the individual characteristics of each country, and the needs of their populations.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has yet received a copy of the Indonesian Government's report of its inquiry into the Santa Cruz killings of November 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received a copy of the summary report of the Indonesian national commission of inquiry. A full report is expected in about two months.

Recognition

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries which are at present recognised by the United Kingdom; those which are not recognised by the United Kingdom but are members of the United Nations, and countries whose recognition by the United Kingdom is under consideration, respectively.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We recognise as states all 166 member states of the United Nations plus Switzerland, the Holy See, Nauru, Tonga, Tuvalu and San Marino. We also recognise as states the following states which are not member states of the United Nations:

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Moldavia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Croatia, Slovenia.

We are considering the recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and the former Soviet Republic of Georgia.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out Britain's contribution to the United Nations teams investigating chemical weapons production capacity, and stockpiles in Iraq, together with the budgeted costs; and what arrangements have been made to ensure reimbursements of these costs from the Iraqi Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom has provided inspectors for seven chemical weapons inspections as follows:

Inspection	*United Kingdom inspectors/experts*
UNSCOM 2	Three
UNSCOM 9	One
UNSCOM 11	One
UNSCOM 12	One
UNSCOM 17	Five, including the deputy leader and a CBDE Porton Down analytical team, plus a further CBDE Porton analytical team in the area.
UNSCOM 20	One
UNSCOM 21	One (this was a joint CW and BW inspection)

Samples from UNSCOMs 2, 9 and 11 were analysed at the chemical and biological defence establishment—CBDE—Porton Down. Chemical agent monitors, individual protection equipment, tropical bleach and Fullers' Earth for decontamination, sampling kits, RAF transport, a gas chromatograph—mass spectrometer, infra-red spectrometer and fume cupboards, a generator and specialist search equipment were also made available for use during the inspections.

In addition to providing assistance for specific inspections, a senior CBDE Porton Down scientist is a full time member of the special commission and another is chairman of the commission's chemical weapon destruction advisory panel. Both have participated in fact finding missions to Iraq to discuss plans for the destruction of Iraq's mustard and nerve agent stockpile.

The United Kingdom made available £1 million for costs arising from the implementation of Security Council resolution 687, including equipment costs. The inspectors' travel and subsistence costs are borne by the United Nations. The costs of the commission itself and destruction of the chemical weapons stockpile and facilities will ultimately be recovered from Iraq under the terms of 1991 Security Council resolutions 687, 706 and 712.

Nuclear Safeguards Agreement

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications Her Majesty's Government have had with the Governments of Syria, Tunisia and Yemen over their respective failure to complete nuclear safeguards inspection agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have regularly urged all non-proliferation treaty parties, and especially those with nuclear facilities, to comply with their obligation under the treaty to conclude and implement full scope safeguards agreements with the IAEA at the earliest opportunity. Tunisia has in fact concluded such an agreement; regrettably, Syria and Yemen have not as yet done so.

Nuclear Explosive Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the international commerce in nuclear explosive materials.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Under article 1 of the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons the United Kingdom has undertaken

"not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly or indirectly".

As a depositary for the treaty, the United Kingdom has always taken its responsibility very seriously and is a member of both the Zangger committee and the nuclear supplies group which are the main bodies which deal with transfers of nuclear-related equipment.

Iran

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made in normalising relations with Iran; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 18 December 1991. We hope that the relationship with Iran will evolve in a positive direction.

Nuclear Arms and Human Rights

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requirements Her Majesty's Government have laid down in recognising new states in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in respect of their adherence to nuclear arms control and human rights treaties including *(a)* the 1963 partial nuclear test ban treaty, *(b)* the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty and *(c)* the 1975 Helsinki accords on human rights; and what discussions (i) he has had and (ii) he plans with his counterparts in these respective new states.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The European Community guidelines adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 16 December on the recognition of new states in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union cite respect for the commitments in the Helsinki final act and charter of Paris and acceptance of all relevant disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation commitments as factors relevant to the process of recognition. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met his counterparts in Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Russia during his visit on 18 to 20 January, and stressed the importance we attach to non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. He has no immediate plans to meet foreign ministers of any other newly independent states in Europe.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters in regard to nuclear non-proliferation were *(a)* discussed and *(b)* decided on his recent visits to (i) India, (ii) Kazakhstan, (iii) Ukraine and (iv) Russia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend discussed nuclear non-proliferation and the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—NPT—in all four countries. In India he urged early adherence to the NPT and commended the United States proposal for talks on nuclear restraint in south Asia. He received assurances from Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan that nuclear weapons would continue to remain under central control and that the latter two countries would also accede to the NPT in due course.

Gold Deposits

Sir Robin Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement concerning the gold deposited in the Bank of England by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As the movement towards the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania gathered pace in 1990, Baltic representatives and supporters raised questions about the gold which the Baltic central banks had deposited with the Bank of England before the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in 1940. On 8 May 1990 my right hon. Friend the former Minister of State told the House that if the Baltic states achieved their independence they could advance claims for the gold.

Following the Government's recognition of the independence of the Baltic states on 27 August 1991, I immediately visited the three states and made clear that we hoped to settle the question of the gold promptly and on a basis satisfactory to all concerned. We invited representatives of each Baltic state to come to London for a first round of discussions on the gold and other financial matters. These took place in November: the Baltic Governments each formally lodged a request for their respective share of the gold.

Since then we have been working up appropriate proposals. This work has been completed. In general terms, the Government would like to see these questions settled on the following basis. We propose to transfer to each Baltic state gold equal in quantity to the gold deposited with the Bank of England before 1940 by its respective central bank, or the gold's equivalent value in money should the Baltic states themselves so prefer. We envisage this transfer as part of a settlement whereunder in each case no further claims would be pursued by either Government. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister this morning met President Landsbergis of Lithuania at Downing street and conveyed to him in general terms our proposals; he also sent parallel messages to the Prime Ministers of Estonia and Latvia.

We have invited each Baltic Government to send representatives for further rounds of discussion aimed at completing the various technicalities involved; meetings with an Estonian delegation and a Lithuanian delegation are scheduled for 27 and 28 January respectively. We hope to reach final agreement with each Baltic Government by the end of March.

We want our relations with the newly-independent Baltic states to begin on the best possible footing. We are very pleased to be on the way to bringing this long-standing question to a satisfactory conclusion.

Horn of Africa

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will take steps to ensure that instability in the Horn of Africa is discussed at the current month's New York summit on the role of the United Nations and that consideration is given to steps that might be taken to recognise and support the continuation of relative stability that has been achieved by the current administration in Northern Somalia (Republic of Somaliland).

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 21 January 1992, at column *105*.

European Community

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to establish an induction course for new Members on the working of the European Community including a visit to Community institutions.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I have no plans to do so, but this is a matter which the hon. Member may wish to raise with the Administration Committee. I should point out that on 6 December 1991, the House agreed to provide for reimbursement of the costs of one visit on parliamentary business to a Community institution by a Member in any year.

DEFENCE

Chapelcross

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facility will be provided to replace the tritium and plutonium presently produced at Chapelcross when the Chapelcross Magnoxes are shut down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Arrangements for the supply of tritium and plutonium to meet the requirements of defence nuclear programmes are kept under constant review.

Low flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers of low-flying sorties by aircraft type *(a)* for the period June to December 1990 and *(b)* for the period January to December 1991.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The numbers of low-flying sorties by aircraft type carried out in the United Kingdom for the periods June to December 1990 and January to November 1991, the most recent date for which figures are available, are as follows:

	Numbers of Aircraft type	
Aircraft type	*June-December 1990*	*January-November 1991*
Buccaneer	1,239	1,442
F-4	993	1,477
Harrier	3,926	5,447
Hawk	10,734	14,664
Jaguar	3,502	5,686
Jet Provost	5,948	9,377
Tornado	12,787	19,667
Tucano	1,339	2,652

Aircraft type	June-December 1990	January-November 1991
A-10	7,065	8,867
F-111	5,232	8,964
Other aircraft including helicopters	26,648	42,749
Total sorties	79,413	120,992

USAF Munitions Accident

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will send the hon. Member for Don Valley a copy of the Health and Safety Executive report on its investigation of the United States Air Force munitions convoy accident near King's Lynn on 13 September 1991; what action has been taken following the report; and if he will place a copy of the Health and Safety Executive report in the Library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Health and Safety Executive investigated this incident and concluded that there has been no breach of regulations governing the carriage of munitions. It was not asked to produce a formal report. We are, however, carrying out a comprehensive review of our arrangements for notifying the police of munitions movements by road.

Submarines

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any changes have been made since 1989 to instructions given to a submarine commander in the event of his vessel becoming entangled in fishing nets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The guidance given to commanding officers in the event of submarines becoming entangled in fishing nets has been revised to reflect the recommendations of the Royal Navy's board of inquiry following the loss of the FV Antares. This mainly reflected changes to the communications and alert procedures and the circumstances under which a submarine may leave the scene of the incident. The guidance has always stressed that the safety of life must take precedence over all other considerations.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

EC Meetings

Mr. Allen: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, for each of the conferences since 1979, what expenditure has been incurred for the attendance by the House of Commons representatives at the meetings of presiding officers of national parliaments of the EC.

Mr. Beith *[holding answer 20 December 1991]:* Since 1979 seven conferences of the Speakers or presiding officers of parliaments of EC countries have been held: in 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1989 and 1991. In 1987 an additional extraordinary meeting was convened in Berlin to mark that city's 750th anniversary.

As the Fees Office accounting system for those years did not separate out the costs attributable to these events, it has not been possible without disproportionate effort to search out figures for them all. It has been possible, however, to extract the costs for the conferences held in Madrid in 1989 and Berlin in 1991. They were £1,298·78 and £1,502·48, respectively.

New accounting methods being introduced into the Department of Finance and Administration should allow information of this kind to be more accessible in future.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on past and future private sector research into alternatives to CFCs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The proposed early phase out of Montreal protocol substances has encouraged rapid development of a range of alternative processes in all user sectors. United Kingdom producers continue to be in the forefront of both national and international research into drop-in replacements and new technologies, including the programme for alternative fluorocarbon toxicity testing.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research his Department has commissioned or carried out into alternatives to CFCs; and what was the *(a)* cost, *(b)* type of alternative and *(c)* company involved in each project for the last five years and for 1992.

Mr. Leigh: The Department of Trade and Industry has carried out research and commissioned studies into the economic effects and availability of CFC alternatives, and has funded collaborative industry projects as follows.

Date	Project	Type of research	Type of alternative	Company involved	Cost
1987—ongoing	NPL Soldering Club	Collaborative	Electronics Cleaning	Over 100 United Kingdom Electronics Companies	N/A
March 1989	Assessing alternatives to CFCs	Conference Paper	Refrigerant	National Engineering Laboratory (NEL)	N/A
November 1989	Flooded Evaporator Heat Transfer	Conference Paper	Refrigerant	NEL	N/A
November 1989	Physical Properties of CFC alternatives	Conference Paper	Refrigerant	NEL	N/A

Date	Project	Type of research	Type of alternative	Company involved	Cost
September—December 1989	CFCs and Halons—the Scope for Recycling and Recovery	Market Survey	Aerosol Propellants Solvents Refrigerants Foam Blowing Agents Fire Extinguishers	Coopers & Lybrand Mott McDonald CS Todds various users and producers	£120k
September 1991	Defluxing of electronic assemblies An assessment of CFC replacements	Collaborative Research joint MoD/DTI industry	Aqueous, Semi Aqueous, and hydrocarbon cleaning, no clean fluxes	STC GEC Marconi BAe Dynamics	£631k (of which DTI funding £217k
November 1991—Ongoing	Further demand for HCFCs and effects of use controls	Market Survey	HCFCs, alternative refrigerants, foam blowing agents, cleaning technologies	Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte, various producers and users	Project in progress

To obtain details of cost of research completed prior to 1990 would involve disproportionate costs. There are no firm plans for further research in 1992.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the dates of any regular meetings and one-off seminars regarding ozone depletion involving his Department within the last three years; and if he will make a statement on plans for future meetings and seminars.

Mr. Leigh: Since the establishment of the DTI environment unit in March 1990 meetings have been held regularly with the various industry user sectors usually on a three monthly basis, to discuss Montreal protocol issues. During 1991 the Department also conducted a series of 17 environmental seminars around the United Kingdom in which ozone depletion featured among a wide range of topics. The DTI has in addition provided speakers for other seminars dealing specifically with ozone layer issues and attended ad hoc meetings with producer and user industry representatives. Officials of the Department are also involved in EC and international negotiations on such issues. It is envisaged that this pattern of contacts will continue for the foreseeable future.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet representatives of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss the recession in manufacturing industry in the north-west region.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend keeps in touch with the CBI on a wide range of business matters and next expects to meet representatives of the CBI on 4 February.

Car Exports

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the levels of exports of the British car industry in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Leigh: The number of cars produced for export was 280,729 in 1989, 405,769 in 1990 and 605,425 in 1991. This last figure represents a 49 per cent. increase on the 1990 figure.

Car Industry

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on prospects for the car industry.

Mr. Leigh: The outstanding export performance of the United Kingdom car industry over the past year has done much to alleviate the short term difficulties which the recent slump in domestic demand has caused. In addition, the medium and long-term prospects for the industry look excellent. In particular the inward investment projects currently being undertaken by Nissan, Toyota and Honda look set to have a profoundly positive effect on the United Kingdom car manufacturing sector. Last week's announcement that Nissan is to increase production at its Sunderland plant to 270,000 units a year by next year, creating 600 new jobs, is of course very welcome, and will serve to continue the revolution which the United Kingdom supplier industry is currently undergoing as a result of the exacting requirements demanded by Nissan, and indeed increasingly by the longer established vehicle builders. Such developments mean that annual United Kingdom car production should be well on the way to 2 million units by the mid to late-1990s, with an increasingly substantial proportion of it going for export.

Insurance Enterprises

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to review the use of the term "mutual" by those enterprises he regulates through the Insurance Acts.

Mr. Redwood: I have decided that the Department should join the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation in undertaking a general review of the use of the word mutual in the marketing of insurance products and in the titles of companies providing those products.

Bus Operations

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial assistance has been provided to Volvo Bus and the previous owners of Leyland's bus operations in Workington and Farington in each year for the last five years.

Mr. Leigh: The following financial assistance has been provided to Volvo Bus Ltd. (formerly Leyland Bus Ltd.) in the last five years for the Workington plant:

	£
1987	482,484
1988	377,667
1989	nil

	£
1990	nil
1991	nil

No financial assistance was given to the Farington plant in this period.

Manufacturing Plants

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to take in respect of proposals by non-EC companies to close down manufacturing plants in the United Kingdom which provide for the strategic needs of the public sector.

Mr. Leigh: Individual cases are considered on their merits; but in general decisions on the future of manufacturing plants are for the directors of the company concerned.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the sections of the Companies Acts which relate to appropriation of pension surpluses in a company's accounts.

Mr. Redwood: There are no specific provisions in the Companies Acts dealing with the accounting treatment of a pension scheme surplus in a company's accounts. However, the accounting treatment of pension scheme surpluses is dealt with in an accounting standard, SSAP24. There are also Inland Revenue [illegible] about pension fund surpluses in connection with eligibility for tax relief.

Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation under which companies in their annual accounts would be required to show the amount of exports to EC and non-EC countries.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to add to the present statutory requirements in respect of segmental information.

Price Level Accounting

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to require large companies to adopt a system of price level accounting.

Mr. Redwood: No. The valuation bases of assets in company accounts are best dealt with by accounting standards.

Liechtenstein (Companies)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid into the insolvency service account in each of the past four years by the Official Receiver and liquidators appointed by his Department *(a)* in total and *(b)* which had been recovered from companies based in Liechtenstein.

Mr. Redwood: The value of receipts paid into the Insolvency Services Account in each of the past four years is as follows, broken down by insolvency type:

Year	Bankruptcy £ million	Compulsory £ million	Voluntary £ million
1987-88	38·4	52·9	118·7
1988-89	55·9	55·8	106·7
1989-90	50·3	52·3	89·1
1990-91	53·2	85·6	187·8

No separate information is available regarding amounts recovered from Liechtenstein.

EC Trade Marks Office

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress his Department has made in seeking to secure the proposed new EC trade marks office for a United Kingdom location; and what consideration he has recently given to specific United Kingdom sites, including the London borough of Harrow.

Mr. Leigh: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave him on 11 March 1991, *Official Report*, column *385*. There have been no developments and the position is unchanged.

British Steel

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the date of the meetings between himself or a Minister in his Department and the management of British Steel at which Ravenscraig was discussed in the last six months.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend meets the chairman of British Steel from time to time. The last meeting was on 20 December, and Ravenscraig was among the subjects discussed.

Manufacturing, Planning and Implementation Studies

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what sum of money has been allocated for the manufacturing, planning and implementation studies programme for 1991-92; what proportion thereof had been allocated as at 31 December 1991; how many (i) successful, (ii) unsuccessful and (iii) pending applications there have been for assistance under the programme; what arrangements his Department has made to monitor the administration of the programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* Funding of the manufacturing planning and implementation studies—MPI—programme is £10,500,000, which has been allocated on the basis of the three year life of the programme, rather than by individual years. As of 31 December 1991, four applicants had accepted offers of grants totalling £200,000. Eighty-two applications have been received, 36 have been rejected and 46 are being progressed.

The MPI programme is continuously monitored by the Department through regular meetings with the scheme contractor, and the sampling of project applications. In addition, an independent review panel reports to the Department on matters surrounding the operation of the programme.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the cost per job limit for regional selective assistance was last reviewed.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 20 January 1992]*: The regional selective assistance scheme is kept under continuous review with a view to ensuring that the scope for encouraging worthwhile and efficient investment in the assisted areas remains unimpaired.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 21 January 1992]*: My Department has incurred no significant costs on the production, distribution and publicity of citizens charter proposals.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Tidbury Green School, Solihull

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his Department's assessment of the condition of Tidbury Green school in Solihull.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend does not assess the condition of individual county and controlled schools. Solihull LEA's annual capital guidelines for 1991-92 and 1992-93 take account of both the projected deficit of school places in the area served by Tidbury Green school and the total number of sub-standard places in the authority's schools, as measured by the local education authority.

Polytechnics

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much funding has been made available to polytechnics for improvement and renovation of buildings.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Government have made available some £340 million in capital grant to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council to date. Of this, the council has allocated some £140 million to institutions for building improvements, renovations, additions and extensions. Separate information on building improvements and renovations at polytechnics is not held centrally.

The planned overall total for 1992-93 is some 50 per cent. higher than that of 1989-90.

Music Teaching

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on increasing the teaching of musical instrument playing in primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the report of the National Curriculum Council on music in the national curriculum for pupils aged five to 14. He intends to publish shortly, for consultation, a draft order for music, together with a draft associated document containing attainment targets and programmes of study. These will set out what pupils should achieve in music and the matters, skills and processes they should be taught so that they can reach their objectives.

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy for increasing the number of teachers in primary and secondary schools who are trained to teach the playing of musical instruments.

Mr. Fallon: The Government are taking steps both to increase the supply of music teachers and to improve the skills of existing teachers of music. Measures include substantial support for in-service training and the funding of a video designed to interest more young people in a career in music teaching. Since 1990, the Government criteria for the approval of teacher training courses have stipulated that all students on primary phase courses are trained to teach music to the level required by the National Curriculum. Recruitment to secondary phase courses in music has been increasing since 1989, including an 18 per cent. rise in 1991.

Access Funds

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to increase the size of access funds to reflect the increase in the number of students.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The size of the access funds for 1993-94 will be considered in this year's public expenditure round.

Pupil Numbers

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average size of *(a)* a secondary school and *(b)* a primary school in England measured by the number of pupils.

Mr. Fallon: The average sizes of maintained primary and secondary schools, measured by the number of pupils including part-time pupils, are given in the following table. Separate figures are given for middle schools, which are therefore excluded from the primary and secondary averages.

	Average size January 1991
Primary schools[1]	210
Middle deemed primary schools	282
Middle deemed secondary schools[2]	391
Secondary schools[2]	778

[1] Includes centres for teaching English as a second language.
[2] Includes grant-maintained schools.

Prison Education

Sir Charles Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he intends to make to ensure the contribution of the full range of prison educational provision after implementation of the proposals in the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Secretary of State for the Home Department has responsibility for the provision of education in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales.

At present, local education authorities accept invitations to provide education for prisons and provision is usually made through a college of further education. Following the transfer of colleges of further education out of local authority control on 1 April 1993, subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill, the Secretary of State for the Home Department will invite colleges to provide education for prison establishments direct. This will ensure clearer lines of responsibility and better accountability.

All-seater Stadiums

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications he has blocked from football clubs requesting grants towards all-seater stadiums; whether he will list their names and the amounts of cash involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have made it clear to the trust that in my view it should continue to pay grant to any club in the present first division of the Football League for works to be completed or under way by the end of this close season. I am not yet in a position to offer support for a change in the Football Trust's resolution of April 1990 to allow premier league clubs, once that league is established, to have access to moneys made available to the trust following the reduction in pool betting duty in 1990. I prefer not to take matters further until I have received satisfactory clarification from the Football Association of the funds likely to be generated by FA-driven initiatives and their split between the premier league and Football League clubs for purposes of implementing the Taylor report.

Earth Sciences

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make bursaries available for students taking postgraduate certificate in education courses in earth sciences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: With effect from September 1991, students undertaking postgraduate certificate in education courses composed principally of physics, chemistry or biology, or any combination of those subjects, are eligible to receive a bursary. My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans for any further extension of the scope of the bursary scheme.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. James Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, what changes for the 1992-93 financial year he has decided to make in the arrangements for calculating annual maintenance grant for grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have considered carefully the responses to the consultation paper we issued on 17 October. Subject to one small technical change, I have decided to confirm the proposals set out in the paper for calculating the annual maintenance grant—AMG—for grant-maintained—GM—schools in 1992-93.

The main changes for 1992-93 are:

(a) the standard percentage add-on that GM schools receive based on LEAs' average central expenditure will be 15 per cent. over and above the direct costs element of their grant compared with 16 per cent. in 1991-92;

(b) where 15 per cent. or more of the maintained primary or secondary schools in the area of a local education authority are grant-maintained, the percentage add-on for GM schools will be based on scrutiny of central spending in the authority;

(c) the Secretary of State will have power to substitute historic weightings or factors where elements of an individual local management of schools—LMS—scheme have been changed or cease to apply, with unfair results for GM schools.

In response to points raised in consultation, I have approved one small technical change concerning the treatment of expenditure on premature retirement compensation in the calculation of the non-standard additions in *(b)*.

Most of the responses I have received have focused on the central costs element of AMG. GM schools have been concerned about my proposal to reduce the standard percentage add-on to 15 per cent., in line with the increased delegation by LEAs to their schools, and to allow different figures in authorities with many GM schools. I understand the schools' anxieties.

Local authorities have expressed most concern about my proposal that, as last year, the central costs element of GM schools' grant should not be able to fall in cash terms from one year to the next. I have considered carefully their arguments, but concluded that these arrangements provide an essential element of certainty and continuity in the funding of GM schools.

I have had to consider arrangements which will apply to all GM schools and their former LEAs. Overall I believe my proposals are even-handed, recognising the progress local authorities have made on delegation, while retaining sufficient stability and certainty for individual schools.

When we introduced the standard percentage addition for central costs last year we said that we would review the position for when our new LMS targets come into place in April 1993. I think it right to make these early adjustments, in particular to help local authorities with significant numbers of GM schools in their area. We shall look carefully at the arrangements again for 1993-94, when we would expect to reflect further progress on delegation.

My Department will now prepare regulations to give effect to these proposals, which I shall lay before the House in due course.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Quota

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy regarding the introduction of a sheep quota.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 13 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *566*.

MacSharry Proposals

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has made to other member states regarding the MacSharry proposals and their discriminatory impact on United Kingdom agriculture.

Mr. Curry: In addition to making clear the United Kingdom's views on the reform of the common agricultural policy at meetings of the Agriculture Council, my right hon. Friend the Minister has, since October, had detailed discussions with his opposite numbers in the Netherlands—twice—Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal—twice, most recently in January—and Spain. On all occasions he emphasised the United Kingdom's firm opposition to the discriminatory aspects of the Commission's proposals.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further measures he proposes to take to ensure that the common agricultural policy is uniformly implemented in all member states.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission is responsible for ensuring that the common agricultural policy is implemented properly in all member states. We are always ready to draw to the Commission's attention any failures by other member states to implement the CAP.

Farming Co-operatives

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he proposes to take to encourage United Kingdom farmers to form co-operatives.

Mr. Curry: Proposals for a new group marketing grant to encourage the development of producer groups with real commercial expertise have been issued to interested organisations for comment. Any group with a clear legal identity including co-operatives may be eligible to apply.

Oak Trees

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to minimise the damage of disease among oak trees.

Mr. Curry: Under plant health legislation administered by the Forestry Commission, imports of oak plants and oak wood to Great Britain are strictly coptrolled to guard against the introduction of new pests and diseases, particularly oak wilt disease from north America. Imports of oak plants are prohibited from areas where such pests or diseases are known to occur, while oak plants from other areas and all oak wood are subject to inspection and have to be free of these pests and diseases.

In addition, the Forestry Commission investigates instances of ill health in oak trees in Britain, and it is currently conducting research into the local decline of oak at several places, mostly in the east midlands.

Over the past decade there have been many reports of death and dieback of oaks—Quercus robur and Q petraea—in various European countries. In Britain only a few such cases had been reported prior to 1988, but in 1989 the Forestry Commission pathology branch received several inquiries about dieback in woodland and parkland oak and initiated an investigation into the problems.

There are about 30 sites in the southern half of England where the problem is known to occur. These are mostly in the east midlands but are also to be found as far apart as Devon and Kent. The trees range from 40 to 200 years old and occur on a range of soil types. About half are in woodlands and the remainder in parkland. Although the onset of symptoms—small leaves, yellow pale green foliage, dieback of branches—mainly dates to 1987-88, growth of many of the affected trees started to decline around 1984-85.

At present a variety of factors appear to be involved in the decline syndrome but the same factors may not be involved on each site. The onset of growth decline in the mid eighties suggests that some event such as the droughts in the summers of 1983 and 1984 or the severe winters of 1984, 1985 and 1986 may have acted as a trigger for the problem. The role of defoliating caterpillars, such as those of the oak leaf roller moth and the winter moth is unclear. Recent years have not been marked by particularly serious outbreaks of these insects. On some sites the trees appear to be suffering from lime-induced chlorosis. Evidence from the investigation of the root systems of trees on three sites indicates that root damage is not a major factor. No evidence of a vascular wilt disease, similar to Dutch elm disease, has been found. Leaves from severely affected trees with conspicuous yellow foliage, have been tested for viruses and related pathogens with negative results.

Set-aside Land

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for the latest available date the total percentage of agricultural land in the United Kingdom per region, which is currently set aside, giving percentages for each of the EC countries in relation to agricultural land.

Mr. Curry: The latest information available on the percentage of arable land set aside in the United Kingdom and other European Community countries is as follows.

United Kingdom

	Estimated area of land in set-aside schemes[1] *(hectares)*	*Arable land*[2] *(hectares)*	*Percentage of arable land set-aside*
England	138,789	5,196,171	2·67
Scotland	28,614	1,063,597	2·69
Wales	1,851	225,690	0·82
Northern Ireland	398	250,447	0·16

Notes:

[1] Includes 1988, 1989 and 1990 participants and 1991 applicants for the Five-year Set-aside scheme as well as 1991 applicants for the One-year Set-aside scheme.

[2] *Source:* Agricultural Statistics United Kingdom 1989.

Other European Community Countries[1]

	Estimated area of land in five year set-aside scheme (hactares)	*Arable land (hectares)*	*Percentage of arable land set-aside*
United Kingdom	132,000	6,867,000	1·9
Germany (excluding former GDR)	299,837	7,265,000	4·0
Netherlands	15,199	897,000	1·7
Belgium	706	711,000	0·1
France	166,575	17,659,000	0·9
Ireland	1,766	1,029,000	0·2
Spain	84,087	15,660,000	0·5
Greece	250	2,925,000	0·009
Italy	608,705	9,010,000	6·8
Luxembourg	122	56,000	0·22
Denmark	4,719	2,577,000	0·2

Notes:

[1] *Source:* European Commission Working Document VI/5279/91 of 22 October 1991. Only includes 1988, 1989 and 1990 intake into five-year set-aside scheme except for Greece (only 1989) and Denmark (only 1990). Commission figures not available for 1991 applications for five year and one-year set-aside schemes. Portugal exempt from five year scheme until 1994.

Cereals

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total amount of cereal substitutes *(a)* imported to and *(b)* produced in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if he will give the total tonnage of natural cereals held in stock in the European Community over the same period.

Mr. Curry: The volume of United Kingdom imports of cereal substitutes, as defined in annex D of EC regulation 2727/75, during the last five years for which complete data are available was as follows:

	'000 tonnes
1986	1,036
1987	1,091
1988	1,144
1989	833
1990	1,235

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Data on United Kingdom production of cereal substitutes are not collected centrally. However, the volume of cereal substitutes of United Kingdom origin used for animal feed during the last five years is estimated to be as follows:

Crop years July to June	*'000 tonnes*
1986-87	2,199
1987-88	2,253
1988-89	2,320
1989-90	2,253
1990-91	2,219

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The figures do not necessarily include all cereal substitutes, for example, citrus pulp, which might be produced in the United Kingdom from imported raw materials.

Information on the volume of natural cereals—grain—held in European Community intervention stocks is placed in the Library of the House on a monthly basis.

Suckler Cow Premium

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department expects to pay the additional suckler cow premium support allocated by the EC in 1991.

Mr. Curry: The changes agreed by the Agriculture Council at its meeting on 11 to 13 December 1991 do not oblige the United Kingdom to increase the rates applying here. Nevertheless, the Government are currently considering what action they should take in the light of those changes.

MCA Applications

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date his Department dispatched application forms for monetary compensatory amounts to United Kingdom farmers, listing the date of dispatch for each of the past five years.

Mr. Curry: Monetary compensatory amounts are paid or levied on consignments of certain agricultural products transported from one European Community member state to another, or which enter or leave the Community. This is done on the basis of documents which are verified by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. There is no requirement on farmers or traders to complete special application forms.

Hill Farming Review

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received an indication of the date when the hill farming review is expected to be completed; and if he will make a statement on the current progress of the review.

Mr. Curry: An announcement will be made shortly on the outcome of the 1991 autumn review of the economic conditions in the hills and uplands and the financial assistance that will be available under the hill livestock compensatory allowances scheme 1992.

Genetic Patents

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy regarding genetic patenting and genetically modified organisms; and what consultations he has had with interest groups on these subjects.

Mr. Leigh: I have been asked to reply.

The use of genetically modified organisms offers significant potential for industrial innovation across a wide range of sectors, and promises significant benefit in healthcare and pollution abatement. The Government aim to foster its adoption by industry, where appropriate, through collaborative research and technology transfer, to maximise wealth creation from our excellent science research. To this end, patents should be available for inventions in the field of genetic engineering provided normal requirements of patent law are met.

Safe application of the techniques will be ensured by new regulation under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which implements EC directives on the deliberate release to the environment of genetically modified organisms and the contained use of genetically modified organisms. Public consultation is underway on the detail of the proposed regulation. The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment advises the Secretary of State and the Health and Safety Commission on the human and environmental safety aspects of releases of all types of novel organisms into the environment; its membership is drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, including the science base, industry, local authorities, farmers and environmental interest groups.

Certain possible applications of genetic modification give rise to strong views in areas of legitimate public interest and concerns. The Government are reviewing the ethical implications arising from genetic modification and welcomed the establishment of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics which is examining ethical issues related to genetic research. The Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy has given guidance for the medical profession on the treatment of genetic disorders.

SCOTLAND

Ports and Harbours (Safety)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the criteria which support his policy of seeking an 8 per cent. return on capital investment to improve safety at ports and harbours in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government have published their guide to officials and managers in central Government on effective appraisal and evaluation of expenditure proposals. The "Economic Appraisal in Central Government—A Technical Guide for Government Departments" is available through Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The discount rates to be used in appraising public projects are promulgated from time to time by Her Majesty's Treasury.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for each of the last 10 years for which information is available the capital sums spent by his Department on safety improvements at ports and harbours in Scotland and the rate of return on investment which he required in each case.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Most major harbour developments incorporate safety improvements, but it is not possible to quantify separately the investment that is required in each case to achieve those benefits.

Pittenweem Harbour

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what Government assistance has been requested for the construction of a breakwater at Pittenweem harbour; what was his response; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for his decision;

(2) what considerations led him to treat the proposal for a breakwater at Pittenweem harbour separately from the proposals for new fish-handling facilities in assessing whether a suitable rate of return could be obtained on investment;

(3) what was the rate of return on investment of the most recent proposals for improvements to Pittenweem harbour submitted by Fife regional council, taken as a whole.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Fife regional council requested grant towards 50 per cent. of the cost of the breakwater construction, estimated at £1·85 million, under section 2 of the Fisheries Act 1955. A simultaneous request for 50 per cent. grant towards the proposed fish market development, with estimated costs of £1·084 million, is still under consideration.

The investment appraisal submitted by the council indicated a range of estimated rates of return dependent on certain assumptions. The breakwater and fish market were assessed independently, with the agreement of the council's officials, because of the limited mutual benefits of the two projects.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Job Creation

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money has been spent by *(a)* the Industrial Development Board and *(b)* the Local Enterpise Development Unit to promote the creation of jobs in each of the last five years.

Mr. Needham: Expenditure on promoting the creation of new jobs and safeguarding existing jobs was as follows:—

	1986-87 £'million	*1987-88* £'million	*1988-89* £'million	*1989-90* £'million	*1990-91* £'million
Industrial Development Board	74·4	74·5	87·8	77·2	68·4
LEDU	18·7	15·2	18·0	21·3	26·3

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many jobs have been created by the Local Enterprise Development Unit in each of the last five years;

(2) if he will give a breakdown of the number of jobs created in each Westminster constituency by *(a)* the Local Enterprise Development Unit and *(b)* the Industrial Development Board in each of the last five years;

(3) how many jobs have been created by the Industrial Development Board in each of the last five years.

Mr. Needham: This information is not available in the precise form requested. LEDU and the Industrial Development Board seek to promote jobs by encouraging and assisting companies to create employment; figures for the number of jobs promoted by the Industrial Development Board in each Westminster constituency and

by LEDU in each district council area are as follows. It is not possible to say exactly how many jobs were actually created as a result of these promotions. Over recent years, however, the average conversion rate from jobs promoted to jobs created has been 69 per cent. for IDB and 64·9 per cent. for LEDU.

LEDU: New jobs promoted by district council area

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Antrim	112	80	127	220	195
Ards	214	55	107	100	242
Armagh	91	122	107	297	170
Ballymena	77	143	100	160	178
Ballymoney	11	30	39	48	47
Banbridge	37	10	67	66	35
Belfast	828	938	1,108	1,510	1,514
Carrickfergus	157	246	207	103	154
Castlereagh	26	70	60	13	54
Coleraine	140	168	61	123	170
Cookstown	98	61	126	40	76
Craigavon	325	218	281	232	302
Down	222	172	120	190	172
Dungannon	336	201	311	252	278
Fermanagh	196	62	164	200	148
Larne	37	42	85	46	67
Limavady	23	28	80	28	86
Lisburn	163	112	115	256	216
Londonderry	248	361	326	540	329
Magherafelt	111	116	87	108	209
Moyle	57	13	10	16	6
Newry and Mourne	300	347	440	425	466
Newtownabbey	161	103	115	189	341
North Down	105	139	137	154	208
Omagh	83	87	136	163	254
Strabane	86	123	65	31	87
Total	4,244	4,047	4,581	5,510	6,004

IDB: New jobs promoted by Westminster constituency

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Belfast East	—	8	—	106	74
Belfast North	78	—	—	23	—
Belfast South	103	35	303	82	973
Belfast West	98	44	—	496	119
East Antrim	37	230	600	651	129
East Londonderry	109	425	270	166	40
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	137	645	404	212	619
Foyle	227	393	478	827	371
Lagan Valley	255	123	1,049	85	288
Mid Ulster	222	330	16	150	388
Newry and Armagh	137	434	177	34	160
North Antrim	95	232	106	246	460
North Down	243	209	14	425	—
South Antrim	1,655	892	1,386	1,068	185
South Down	110	171	432	56	72
Strangford	247	321	249	87	50
Upper Bann	434	808	169	417	474
TOTAL	4,187	5,300	95,653	5,131	4,402

LEDU

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons are employed by the Local Enterprise Development Unit small business agency; and how many of these employees are identified as members of *(a)* the Protestant community and *(b)* the Roman Catholic community.

Mr. Needham: At 1 January 1991, the most recent date for which figures are available, the total number of persons employed by LEDU was 222, of whom 144 were treated as Protestant and 77 as Roman Catholics. There was one person whose community background could not be determined.

Southern Education and Library Board

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of all contracts awarded by the Southern education and library board, for construction works, in each of the last five financial years giving details of the successful tenderers, the cost and location of works.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of all major contracts—over £200,000—awarded by the board in each of the last five financial years are:

Name of contract	Name of contractor	Cost £
1987-88		
Edenderry Primary School, Banbridge	Messrs. F. B. McKee & Co. Limited, Belfast	658,856·00
Newry College of Further Education	Walls Construction Limited, Carryduff	5,416,990·00
1988-89		
Banbridge Academy	Messrs. Conway Brothers, Ballycassidy, Co. Fermanagh	470,841·32
Board Headquarters, Armagh	Messrs. Connolly & Fee, Coalisland	369,989·00
Waringstown New Primary School	Messrs. Felix O'Hare & Co. Ltd., Newry	708,350·00
1989-90		
Banbridge Academy	Messrs. Felix O'Hare & Co. Ltd., Newry	4,392,267·00
Restoration of Board Headquarters, Armagh	Messrs. John Sinton Limited, Tandragee	900,000·00
Lurgan Branch Library	Killowen Contracts, Warrenpoint	759,154·00
Portadown College of Further Education	O'Hanlon Bros. Construction Ltd., Coalisland	287,137·56
1990-91		
Portadown New Technology Centre	Messrs. Heron Bros, Draperstown	1,078,000·00
1991-92		
Armagh Special School	Messrs. O'Hare & McGovern Ltd., Newry	1,448,940·00
Board Headquarters, 4 & 5 Charlemont Place, Armagh	Messrs. John Sinton Limited, Tandragee	498,750·00
Dromore High School	Messrs. John Sinton Limited, Tandragee	2,948,600·00

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the contractors on the approved select tender lists, for construction contracts, maintained by each education and library board in each of the past five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Boards do not maintain standing select lists of contractors for construction works. Fresh lists are drawn up for each new major contract as it arises.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the criteria used by education and library boards for the creation of select tender lists for construction contracts.

Dr. Mawhinney: The criteria are based on the code of procedure for single stage selective tendering, published by the National Joint Consultative Committee for Building. They include: the firm's financial standing and record; whether the firm has had recent experience of building at the required rate of completion over a comparable contract period; the firm's general experience and reputation in the area in question; whether the management structure of the firm is adequate for the type of contract envisaged; and whether the firm will have adequate capacity at the relevant time.

EMPLOYMENT

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department has only one executive agency which is the Employment Service. The chief executive of the Employment Service did not attend a university or polytechnic and therefore does not hold any degrees.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has only one executive agency. The Employment Service has several quality of service performance indicators. They are to pay benefits promptly; to pay benefits accurately; and to contact everyone unemployed over six months and offer them an advisory interview at six-monthly intervals. The Employment Service also measures the level of overall customer satisfaction through an annual survey. In addition, each local office has targets for waiting times and how quickly the telephone is answered. The speed of payment indicator was in use before the agency was set up.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will list those new facilities for staff, including nurseries and health care schemes, which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment;

(2) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and provide a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each agency;

(3) how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies were established; and how many are in post now, in each case;

(4) if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related elements, in each case where appointments have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above, since their establishment;

(5) if he will list each of his Department's executive agencies that operates a group bonus scheme and state the cash amount per person awarded in the last year for which figures are available, and the conditions attached to its award.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department has only one executive agency which is the Employment Service. Questions on operational matters in the Employment

Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies, including the performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has one executive agency, the Employment Service. The chief executive's remuneration for 1991-92 is £59,000. In addition he can receive a performance bonus of up to 10 per cent. The chief executive's contract extends for two and a half years from 1 April 1990, when the agency was established.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published; and when the next one is due.

Mr. Jackson: The last Employment Service annual report was published on 24 July 1991. The next one is due to be published in July 1992.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency.

Mr. Jackson: The Employment Department's one executive agency, the Employment Service, was launched in April 1990 at a press briefing held at the Department's offices. The materials produced for the briefing cost £8,109 and were paid for by the Department. In addition the Employment Service published "A Guide to the Employment Service for MPs" which cost £1,086.

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, separately for male and female, a table showing how many people have entered employment action and how many are participating in employment action in each month since the start of the programme.

Mr. Jackson: The tables show the number of people receiving employment action allowances as at each count date, plus the number of people starting and receiving an allowance during the month ending at each count date. The figure for starts is not available separately for male and female.

Region	*Starts in month*	*Receiving allowances on Count Date*		
		Male	*Female*	*Total*
Count Date 10 October				
East Midland	15	15	0	15
West Midlands	19	17	2	19
Wales	2	2	0	2
London and South East	18	17	0	17
South West	5	4	1	5
Northern	21	19	2	210
Yorkshire and Humber	83	66	17	83
Scotland	2	2	0	2
North West	46	43	3	46
Total	211	185	25	210
Count Date 14 November				
East Midlands	226	194	34	228
West Midlands	197	190	12	202
Wales	308	284	12	296
London and South East	263	228	49	277
South West	164	142	19	161
Northern	233	206	37	243
Yorkshire and Humber	351	346	68	414
Scotland	69	56	10	66
North West	412	378	59	437
Total	2,223	2,024	300	2,324
Count Date 12 December				
East Midlands	326	458	70	528
West Midlands	257	377	52	429
Wales	266	502	22	524
London and South East	380	493	133	626
South West	203	293	44	337
Northern	289	427	76	503
Yorkshire and Humber	352	599	111	710
Scotland	213	236	27	263
North West	410	696	94	790
Total	2,696	4,081	629	4,710

Region	Starts in month	Receiving allowances on Count Date: Male	Female	Total
Count Date 10 January				
Receiving Allowances on Count Date—5,827				
Breakdown by region, and sex and information on starts not yet available.				

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish tables showing both the latest available results from the youth training leavers' survey and those for a year before in Great Britain as a whole and in each TEC area in England and Wales and each LEC area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of YT leavers who were *(a)* in full-time work with the same employer, *(b)* in full-time work with a different employer, *(c)* in part-time work, *(d)* on a full-time course at a college or training centre, *(e)* on another YT course, *(f)* doing something else or *(g)* unemployed; and if he will indicate for each area how many trainees returned their questionnaires, how many left before completing their agreed training course; how many had worked towards a qualification and how many had actually obtained a vocational qualification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The complete information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. The tables provide information for Great Britain and the regions about the outcomes, responses and qualifications for young people leaving training between April 1989 to March 1990 and April 1990 to March 1991.

Youth training outcomes and qualifications gained
Great Britain and regional data—April 1989 to March 1990

Number and percent.

	Great Britain [1]	Scotland	Northern	Yorkshire/ Humber	North West	West Midlands	Wales	South west	South East	London	East Midlands Anglia
In a job:											
Same employer	34	30	28	32	32	34	31	39	40	31	37
Different employer	28	26	22	26	27	29	27	29	33	31	29
Self-employed	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	2	2
Part time job (up to 30 hrs)	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3
Unemployed	14	17	19	15	16	12	16	9	8	16	11
On another training programme	11	15	16	12	11	10	11	7	5	[illegible]	9
On a full time course	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	[illegible]	4
Doing something else	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	3	3	[illegible]	3
Worked towards a qualification	53	48	49	49	53	55	50	61	61	[illegible]9	56
Gaining qualifications	43	43	37	38	43	44	40	51	51	[illegible]39	45
Number of responses	194,410	26,286	16,609	24,063	28,902	22,756	12,256	13,974	18,335	[illegible]575	22,854
Number of early leavers [2]	246,854	36,818	19,951	30,590	39,764	28,552	16,507	14,931	20,185	13,790	25,766
Percentage	65	70	66	67	67	66	68	57	57	65	62

[1] Including some respondents not allocated to a region
[2] Figures from the YTS Management Informa

Source: YTS Follow Up.

Youth training outcomes and qualifications gained
Great Britain and regional data—April 1990 to March 1991

Number and percent

	Great Britain[1]	Scotland	Northern	Yorkshire/ Humber	North West	West Midlands	Wales	South West	South East	London	East Midlands Anglia	TNPU*
In a job:												
Same employer	29	27	22	28	28	30	26	34	31	23	33	39
Different employer	23	23	20	22	22	24	22	24	26	22	24	23
Self-employed	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1
Part time job (up to 30 hrs)	4	3	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4
Unemployed	20	22	24	22	21	19	23	17	18	26	16	16
On another training programme	10	14	15	11	10	10	10	7	5	7	8	7
On a full time course	6	5	5	5	6	6	5	6	7	8	6	4
Doing something else	5	5	6	6	5	5	6	5	5	6	5	5
Worked towards a qualification	52	44	50	51	52	56	46	61	59	50	57	48
Gaining qualifications	38	36	33	35	38	39	33	47	46	33	42	36
Number of responses	121,679	17,533	9,706	13,941	16,434	12,743	7,318	8,066	8,562	3,813	15,210	4,974
Number of early leavers[2]	160,151	26,227	12,139	16,875	22,334	16,324	9,446	8,867	10,845	6,913	17,953	5,864
Percentage	49	60	54	52	51	54	51	49	52	62	53	14

[1] Includes some respondents not allocated to a region.
[2] As shown on the leaving certificates received.
* INPU TEC National Providers Unit.
Source: YT Follow Up.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for Great Britain and each TEC what is his estimate of the number of ET and of YT trainees who receive English for speakers of other languages training; how many ET trainees are recruited under the specific ESOL eligibility route; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: During 1990-91 about 3 per cent. of all entrants to ET in Great Britain were assessed as requiring English for speakers of other languages—ESOL—training. Figures for those entering in each area now covered by the TEC/LEC network are given in the table. They do not necessarily relate to the provision of individual TECs/LECs. Information is not yet available for YT trainees. During 1990-91 about 2 per cent. of all ET entrants joined under ESOL special eligibility exemption criteria.

Employment training English for speakers of other languages proportion of all entrants—1990-91.

TEC/LEC Area	*Per cent.*
South East	
Essex	1
Hampshire	1
Heart of England	7
Hertfordshire	5
Isle of Wight	1
Kent	3
Milton Keynes and North Bucks	7
Surrey	5
Sussex	3
Thames Valley Enterprise	7
London	
AZTEC	10
North London	14
North West London	12
CILNTEC (City Inner London North)	16
Central London	9
London East	19
SOLOTEC (South London)	4
West London	8
South Thames	12
South West	
Avon	3
Devon/Cornwall	1
Dorset	2
Gloucestershire	1
Somerset	1
Wiltshire	2
West Midlands	
Birmingham	6
CENTEC (Central England)	n/a
Coventry/Warwickshire	3
Dudley	4
HAWTEC (Hereford/Worcestershire)	1
Sandwell	4
Shropshire	2
Staffordshire	4
Walsall	3
Wolverhampton	3
East Midlands	
Bedfordshire	6
Central and South Cambridgeshire	3
North Derbyshire	. .
South Derbyshire	4
Leicestershire	10
Lincolnshire	1
Norfolk and Waveney	2
Northamptonshire	2
Greater Nottingham	2
North Nottinghamshire	1
Greater Peterborough	4
Suffolk	. .
Yorkshire and Humberside	
Barnsley and Doncaster	. .
Bradford and District	2
Calderdale and Kirklees	9
Humberside	1
Leeds	3
Rotherham	4
Sheffield	5
Wakefield	1
North Yorkshire	1
North West	
Bolton/Bury	6
Nor Mid TEC	1
South and East Cheshire	1
Cumbria	[1]—
ELTEC (East Lancashire)	5
LAWTEC (Lancashire Area West)	1
Manchester	2
Merseyside	2
Oldham	7
Rochdale	6
St. Helens (Qualitec)	2
Stockport/High Peak	[1]—
Wigan	1
CEWTEC	2
Northern	
County Durham	1
Northumberland	1
Teesside	1
Tyneside	1
Wearside	[1]—
Wales	
Mid Glamorgan	n/a
South Glamorgan	n/a
Gwent	1
Powys	n/a
North East Wales	n/a
North West Wales	n/a
West Wales	1
Scotland	
Argyll	n/a
Caithness and Sutherland	n/a
Inverness and Nairn	1
Skye and Lochalsh	n/a
Orkney	n/a
Ross and Cromarty	n/a
Shetland	n/a
Western Isles	n/a
Lochaber	n/a
Ayr	[1]—
Borders	n/a
Central	n/a
Dumbarton	[1]—
Dumfries and Galloway	1
Fife	n/a
Glasgow	1
Grampian	n/a
Lanarkshire	1
Lothian	n/a
Renfrew	[1]—
Tayside	n/a

TEC/LEC Area	Per cent.
Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey	n/a

[1] = less than 0·5 per cent.
n/a = not available
Source: ET Starts database

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements are made for non-employed or employed YT or ET trainees who lose their work placement because the employer closes or declares redundancies and who are returned to their YT managing agent or ET training manger; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: All YT and ET trainees should receive individual training plans suitable to their training needs and relevant to employment. Training and enterprise councils are required to ensure that training providers use all reasonable endeavours to complete these plans. Where a provider is unable to fulfil a plan, a TEC must use all reasonable endeavours to ensure that the trainee concerned has the opportunity to continue with an identical, or closely similar, individual training plan.

Employment Service Targets

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress the employment service has made in meeting the targets outlined in the 1991-92 agency agreement; and if he will show for the latest possible date *(a)* the total unemployed job placings and variance from target, *(b)* the long-term unemployed job placings and variance from target, *(c)* people with disabilities job placings and variance from target, *(d)* inner-city job placings and variance from target, *(e)* the number of claims not pursued following initial contact and variance from profiled annual reference level, *(f)* the number of claimants moved from unemployment benefit to another benefit and variance from annual reference level and *(g)* the number of people who withdrew their claim to benefit after contact with fraud investigators and variance from annual reference level.

Mr. Jackson: I am informed by the Chief Executive of the Employment Service that in the period April to September 1991 289,360 people inquired at local offices of the Employment Service about entitlement to benefit but did not pursue a claim—annual reference level 442,000. The number of claimants moved to an appropriate benefit other than unemployment benefit is not a reference level in the ES annual performance agreement for 1991-92. For the remainder of the question I refer the hon. Member to my answer given in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter), on 26 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *496-98*.

Holy Loch

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the health and safety regulations which apply in the case of the salvage ships lifting moorings left in the Holy Loch after the departure of United States personnel and equipment from the base; what steps are being taken to ensure that they are complied with; when they were last reviewed; whether a further review of such health and safety regulations is imminent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I understand that the removal of redundant moorings in the Holy Loch base is being undertaken by vessels operated by the Royal Marine Auxiliary Service —RMAS. Such vessels are not required to register under merchant shipping legislation. However the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974—HSW Act—applies to any vessel carrying out work of this nature. In enforcing the HSW Act, the Health and Safety Executive, through its crown, fire, and police national interest group, has held discussions with representatives of the directorate of marine services of the Ministry of Defence about the safety policy and organisation of RMAS and has regard to the standards generally required under merchant shipping legislation.

Employment Interviews

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give for each region and for Great Britain as a whole for each year since the introduction of the scheme *(a)* the number of people who were helped by the travel-to-interview scheme, *(b)* the number of people whose applications for help were turned down and *(c)* the amount of expenditure on the travel-to-interview scheme; if he will give the latest information he has on whether those helped were successful in getting the jobs, and on the reasons for their applications being rejected; and if he will make a statement;

(2) for the latest available period for Great Britain and for each region how many Restart interviewees fell within the guarantee group and how many fell within the aim group; how many of each group were submitted or placed in either *(a)* employment training, *(b)* enterprise allowance scheme, *(c)* job club, *(d)* job interview guarantee or *(e)* employment action; and of those claimants in the guarantee or aim group how many were not made an offer of help because (i) they were already on or about to start on a scheme, (ii) they were about to leave the unemployment register, (iii) an offer could not be made because there was no appropriate scheme place available or (iv) an offer could not be made due to the claimant's attitude, behaviour or severity of their problem.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

TECs and LECs

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training and enterprise council and local enterprise company chief executives are full voting members of their TEC or LEC boards; how many are in post; how many are *(a)* male, *(b)* female or *(c)* from an ethnic minority background; how many have resigned since their TEC or LEC became operational; what information he has on the employment backgrounds of the chief executives, including the numbers who have retained their civil service status; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The information available in respect of TECs is shown in the table. Information on the ethnic minority background and employment background of directly recruited chief executives is not held centrally.

	Number
Number of chief executives who:	
Are members of the TEC board	42
Are in post (including temporary appointments)	82
Are male	69
Are female	13
Have resigned since the TEC became operational	14
Previously held a post in the department	43
Have retained civil service status	34

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire North-East (Mr. Moss) on 16 December, *Official Report* column *4*, for the proposals on the future staffing arrangements of TECs.

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each region and for Great Britain as a whole for each year since April 1987 *(a)* the number of people who were receiving the enterprise allowance and *(b)* the amount of expenditure on the EAS; if he will give the latest information he has on the survival of those businesses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Information, by region and for Great Britain as a whole, on the numbers of people receiving the enterprise allowance since April 1987 is shown in the table. The figures relate to the number of people receiving EAS at year end 31 March for each year since 1987-88. The table also shows EAS expenditure on allowances for each financial year since 1987-88.

A 1988 survey of a sample of EAS businesses begun in March and April of 1987 showed that 76 per cent. of businesses in Great Britain were still trading six months after completing a full year on the scheme.

Number of people receiving Enterprise allowance: 1987-88 and 1988-89

Region	1987-88	1988-89
London West	7,657	5,852
London East	7,373	7,602
London South	8,202	6,803
South West	9,893	9,289
West Midlands	9,229	8,781
East Midlands	9,001	8,578
Yorkshire and Humberside	9,032	8,980
North West	14,205	13,909
North	5,152	5,311
Scotland	8,710	7,699
Wales	5,854	6,255
Total	94,308	89,059

Note: Totals are in thousands and as at the end of the financial year.

Number of people receiving Enterprise Allowance: 1989-90 and 1990-91

Region	1989-90	1990-91
London	8,377	6,494
South East	7,554	6,142
South West	6,501	4,642
West Midlands	6,916	5,025
East Midlands	7,061	5,653
Yorks and Humberside	7,366	5,658
North West	11,436	8,816
North	4,252	3,257
Scotland	6,310	5,277
Wales	4,896	3,636
Total	70,669	54,600

[1]Totals are in thousands and as at the end of the financial year.

The total amount of expenditure on Enterprise Allowance since 1987 is as follows:

Year	£
1987-88	189,927,902
1988-89	191,580,697
1989-90	167,241,000
1990-91	127,737,506

Labour Statistics

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the change in number of the unemployed for each constituency in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Wales between June 1987 and the latest available date; and what was the net change in (i) Scotland and (ii) Wales.

Mr. Jackson: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Offshore Oil Industry

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment in what circumstances dispensations from health and safety regulations were issued by his Department to offshore oil companies; how many such dispensations were issued for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Directions are issued by the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division under offshore safety legislation which exempt installations from specific statutory requirements for limited periods. Each application is carefully considered and only granted subject to equivalent or higher alternative safety arrangements being in place.

Information on the numbers of directions issued for each of the last 10 years can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about the number of accidents involving *(a)* direct employees and *(b)* contractors' employees in the offshore oil industry for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The numbers of accidents causing death or serious injury on or near to offshore installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf for the calendar years from 1981 to 1990 are as follows:

	Fatalities	Serious Accidents (injuries to persons)
1981	6	59
1982	14	39
1983	10	47

	Fatalities	*Serious Accidents (injuries to persons)*
1984	13	59
1985	8	105
1986	3	101
1987	6	59
1988	[1]173	[2]85
1989	3	85
1990	[3]13	87

[1]167 relate to Piper Alpha.
[2]Include 11 of the Piper Alpha survivors.
[3]Includes six relating to Brent Spar helicopter accident.

A breakdown of accidents involving direct employees and contractors can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"Juliette"

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what recent representations he has received concerning the publication of the book "Juliette" by the Marquis de Sade;

(2) if he will make a statement on the decision of the Crown Prosecution Service not to bring prosecutions against Arrow Books for the publication of the book "Juliette" by the Marquis de Sade.

The Attorney-General: The acting Director of Public Prosecutions announced on 20 December 1991 that he did not intend to institute criminal proceedings against Arrow Books in relation to the publication to which the hon. Member refers. He had concluded, after consulting senior Treasury counsel and leading counsel, that the evidence was insufficient to afford a realistic prospect of conviction. In coming to that decision the acting director had also had regard to the nature of the book, the circumstances of its publication and the statutory defences available under the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

Since that decision was announced, I have received representations from five Members of Parliament and eight other individuals.

Mr. Oliver Pryce

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Director of Public Prosecutions has reached a decision on whether to prosecute police officers in Middlesbrough who were found by an inquest on 29 November 1991 to have unlawfully killed Mr. Oliver Pryce.

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions has requested a transcript of the evidence given at the inquest and will consider the case when it has been received.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Young: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by name the local authorities that have made representations to him about the law on Sunday trading since his statement of 27 November 1991, *Official Report*, columns *913-18*.

The Attorney-General: Since I answered the private notice question from my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) on 27 November 1991 at column *913*, I have received letters from Cambridge city council, the city of Coventry, Hull city council, Ipswich borough council, Scunthorpe borough council and Worthing borough council. In addition, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) forwarded to me a letter he had received from Bournemouth borough council.

De Lorean

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General whether he is still pursuing the Government's claims against Arthur Andersen over the collapse of De Lorean.

Mr. Needham: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Economic Development for Northern Ireland is pursuing its action against Arthur Andersen.

TRANSPORT

Port of Tilbury

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those companies that submitted a bid in respect of the sale of the port of Tilbury by 6 January.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. That is a matter of commercial confidence between the Port of London authority, as vendor of the port of Tilbury, and the parties concerned.

Cornelis Johanna

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to conclude the inquiry into the extent of his Department's liability to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Reeman as a result of the failure of Cornelis Johanna to pass the stability test on 15 November 1990.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am awaiting advice as to the extent of the Department's liability, if any, to the present owners of the Cornelis Johanna.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport further to his letter of 20 December 1991, to the hon. Member for South Hams, if he will set out the results of the inclining experiment so as to establish more precisely the degree to which the stability of the Cornelis Johanna BM 204 is apparently deficient and assist in determining any remedial measures which may be required; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The results of any inclining experiment conducted will be made available to all the parties concerned and advice will be given on any remedial measures necessary to bring the stability up to the required standard.

Coastguard Service

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will specify the consultations including dates of meetings and correspondence which took place on the north coast of Scotland on the review of Her Majesty's coastguard service with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* coastguard staff and *(c)* the public.

Mr. McLoughlin: All coastguard district management teams and sector officers within Aberdeen region, including the north coast of Scotland, were consulted personally by regional management over the sector review during the consultative period lasting from February to June 1991; all views of the coastguard staff so aired were considered.

Local authorities and the public were not directly approached since this was an internal management review.

However, I announced the placing of a copy of the review document in the House of Commons Library to ensure wide circulation of its proposals on 21 March 1991 during the adjournment debate which was in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris).

Traffic

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he is having with local authorities with a view to improving traffic speed and parking in the metropolitan area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I am in the process of consulting local authorities and others on the proposed network of red routes and on guidance on traffic management and parking in London as part of the implementation of part II of the Road Traffic Act 1991. I am also soon to have a discussion with the Parking Committee for London set up by the local authorities under the Act.

NATIONAL FINANCE

VAT

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on applications for payment of unpaid value added tax that are based on evidence collected by computers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Both the Value Added Tax Act 1983 and the VAT General Regulations 1985 give Customs the power to issue demands for payment that are based on information held by a computer. The majority of that information is provided by the taxpayer to Customs and then input manually.

The Finance Act 1985 (section 10) entitles Customs to provide evidence based on computer-held information to a court of law within the meaning of the Civil Evidence Act 1968 (part I). Such evidence may be manually prepared or produced directly from the computer, but is based on information held on the computer. A certificate similarly based, advising the existence of a debt, may also be accepted under schedule 7 of the VAT Act 1983, until such time as the evidence may be refuted.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the advisory cost limit for answering parliamentary questions applies to answers provided by chief executives of executive agencies *(a)* in reply to parliamentary questions and *(b)* in reply to letters from hon. Members.

Mr. Maples: *(a)* Yes, and *(b)* no. The advisory limit has increased to £400, as announced in the *Official Report*, 14 January 1992 at column *546*, and applies where the answers to written parliamentary questions are provided by chief executives of executive agencies. It does not apply to replies to letters from hon. Members.

Central Unit on Purchasing

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will define the present remit of the central unit on purchasing.

Mr. Maude: The central unit on purchasing has been subsumed by the public competition and purchasing unit (PCPU). PCPU's remit is to promote the programme of work set out in the White Paper "Competing for Quality" (Cm 1730), and to continue existing work on the Government purchasing initiative (GPI). This involves advising Departments on how to obtain value for money through the adoption of best purchasing and project management practice, working with Departments to develop professionalism and to create infrastructures to support their purchasing and supply activities, monitoring Departments' progress in implementing the GPI and reporting annually on departmental progress to the Prime Minister.

ENVIRONMENT

Navigation Authorities

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many responses he has received following the consultation over the re-organisation of navigation authorities covering inland waterways; and if he will list the organisations responding and place copies of their responses in the Library.

Mr. Heseltine: The following 26 responses have been received as part of the review of the navigation functions of the British Waterways Board and the National Rivers Authority:

Amateur Rowing Association
Association of Waterway Cruising Clubs
Commercial Narrowboat Operators Association
Country Landowners Association
East Cambridgeshire District Council
English Nature
Neath Borough Council
Port of London Authority
River Wye Preservation Trust
Salmon and Trout Association
Severn Fisheries Council
Turner Marinas Ltd.
Welsh Anglers Council
Wye Salmon Fisheries Association
Association of District Councils
British Canoe Union Council of Welsh Districts
Driffield Land Owners and Occupiers Association
Inland Waterways Association
Mr. Stephen Peters
River Thames Society
Royal Yachting Association
Sedgemoor District Council
Transport and General Workers Union
Water Companies Association
Welsh Salmon & Trout Angling Association

All further responses received will be taken into account. The accepted practice, where responses are made available, is to place a list of organisations responding in the Library of the House of Commons and place copies of the responses in the Department's library. When all the main responses have been received, we shall follow this for all responses where the respondent does not ask for the response to be kept in confidence.

Halcrow Fox

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of his Department's funding of the feasibility study by Halcrow Fox into land

reclamation and open-cast mining in north-west Leicestershire; what are the terms of reference for Halcrow Fox; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My Department has given approval for derelict land grant of £33,300 towards the Ashby Woulds feasibility study to be undertaken by Halcrow Fox and Partners. The purpose is to undertake a feasibility study for utilising the opportunities for the reclamation and after-use of derelict land and other mineral-bearing and vacant sites in the Ashby Woulds area. The Department has also given approval for derelict land grant of £26,200 for a geotechnical survey of the former Donisthorpe colliery tip to be undertaken by the same team of consultants.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the composition of the steering group appointed to guide the work of the study funded by his Department into land reclamation and opencast mining in north-west Leicestershire; if he will make it his policy to ensure the adequate representation of the local community on the steering group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The steering group guiding the feasibility study of reclamation and after-use opportunities for derelict land and other mineral-bearing vacant sites in the Ashby Woulds and Donisthorpe area consists of officers of Leicestershire county council, north-west Leicestershire district council and my Department together with representatives of the British Coal Opencast Executive, A. F. Budge (Mining) Ltd., and Hepworth Building Products Ltd. The local authority members of the steering group take account of the interests of the local community.

Oxleas Wood

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last visited Oxleas wood, south-east London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: Representatives of English Nature, my advisors on matters relating to sites of special scientific interest, have visited Oxleas wood on several occasions, most recently on 28 November 1991.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those sites licensed to take special waste; and if he will indicate which of the sites are currently taking special waste.

Mr. Baldry: The information required is not held centrally in a form which would enable the Department to give an accurate response to the question. The issuing of disposal site licences is the responsibility of the local waste regulation authority in whose area the site is located and it is required to maintain a public register containing copies of disposal licences currently held in its area.

Unitary Development, Tyne and Wear

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what strategic advice was offered to each authority in Tyne and Wear county on the number of additional houses and households to provide for in their unitary development plans; and whether his Department's more recent household projections for Tyne and Wear will give rise to any revision of his guidance.

Mr. Yeo: The "Strategic Guidance for Tyne & Wear", which was issued in April 1989, stated that the five unitary development plans should provide for a basic requirement of 30,100 dwellings to be built between the beginning of 1988 and the end of 2001. These would be distributed as follows:

	Number
North of the River Tyne (City of Newcastle upon Tyne and North Tyneside MB)	12,600
Gateshead MB	5,800
South Tyneside MB	5,000
Sunderland MB	6,700
Total	30,100

This strategic guidance has formed the basis of the draft plans currently in course of preparation in the five districts. It is being monitored by the district councils and will be revised and updated as necessary. Recent household projections will be taken into account in the revision process.

Building Regulations (Fire)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account was taken of the weight of responses to the Building Regulations (Fire) Consultation Document issued in March 1990 concerning periods of fire resistance, compartment size and non-conbustibility in producing the 1992 edition of the Building Regulations Fire Safety Approved Document.

Mr. Yeo: The Department received some 220 responses to the consultation document on proposed amendments to part B (Fire Safety) of the Building Regulations 1985. The comments were fully and carefully considered and we concluded that it would be appropriate to make some changes to the guidance before publishing it as an approved document. Certain fire resistance periods were increased, as we were persuaded that those proposed may not have taken sufficient account of possible risks to firefighters. Provisions for certain building elements to be constructed of materials of limited combustibility were reintroduced for hospitals and fire fighting shafts, where for different reasons people may be expected to remain in the vicinity of a fire for longer than would normally be expected. We also accepted the suggestion that it would be more appropriate to consider compartment volume rather than floor area when deciding on maximum permitted compartment sizes in buildings used primarily for storage purposes. This takes account of the increased fire load associated with high stacks of stored goods.

Council Tax

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will consider the use only of certificated bailiffs for recovery of council tax arrears;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to apply section 15 of the Court and Legal Services Act 1990 to goods which can be seized by private bailiffs when recovering arrears of council tax.

Mr. Key: No. The employment of bailiffs is a matter for each local authority to determine. Local authorities will issue their bailiffs with a code of practice. These codes, which control the activities of bailiffs, will include the goods which can be distrained. I consider that this provides sufficient safeguards for both council tax payers and local authorities.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will relax the two-year time limit within which action must be taken against community charge defaulters.

Mr. Heseltine: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I will shortly be laying regulations to extend from two to six years the time within which enforcement action may be taken. Whilst authorities will have been able to take action against the bulk of community charge defaulters within the original two years, this will not be possible in every case. We are determined that authorities should be able to enforce against all defaulters. There will be no amnesty for non-payers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received on abolition of private bailiffs for recovery of community charge arrears; and what response he has made.

Mr. Key: We have received a number of representations. We believe that local authorities should continue to be able to call on the assistance of private bailiffs in enforcing the community charge.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what guidance he has issued to local authority associations regarding the offering of realistic repayment arrangements for people in arrears with community charge before taking court action to recover arrears;

(2) what guidance he has issued to local authority associations on the order in which the following enforcement remedies for recovery of community charge arrears should be used when more than one are applicable *(a)* attachment of earnings, *(b)* deductions from income support and *(c)* distress;

(3) what guidance he issues to local authority associations regarding the processing of outstanding claims for community charge benefit before taking court action to recover arrears of community charge;

(4) if he will review the guidance for *(a)* prevention of arrears and *(b)* recovery of arrears of community charge when issuing guidance on arrears of council tax.

Mr. Key: My Department, in conjunction with the local authority associations, produced a series of community charge practice notes to assist local authorities with the implementation of the community charge. The note on the collection of the charge advised authorities about their discretion to accept payments on account and to permit flexible payment arrangements for community charge payers. The note on enforcement explains that it is for the authority to decide, in each case, which power to use in particular circumstances; or the order in which the powers are to be used having regard to the cost-effectiveness of the various options. It is not a defence against the making of a liability order that a benefit claim is outstanding. However, we expect local authorities to seek to ensure that they do not summons people where bona fide benefit applications are outstanding.

As with the community charge my Department in conjunction with the local authority associations will be issuing a new set of practice notes to assist local authorities with the implementation of the council tax. In producing these notes we shall of course look at all aspects of the administration of the tax to see what lessons can be learnt from the community charge.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will review his policy on the provision of weekly/fortnightly payment methods for payment of the council tax;

(2) if he will commission research to examine the cost effectiveness of setting up weekly payment arrangements for the council tax in order to prevent arrears.

Mr. Key: We are content that the Local Government Finance Bill provides a sufficiently flexible regime for council tax payments. Tax payers will have a right to pay in 10 monthly instalments. In addition authorities can offer their tenants the option of making payments at the same frequency as their rent payments. This could include weekly or fortnightly payments. There is nothing to prevent an authority making agreements with tax payers about the frequency of instalment payments, but such agreements would fall outside the statutory enforcement procedures. It will be for local authorities to decide, within the flexibility provided, which is the most cost effective approach.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those local authorities who will lose area protection grant in 1992-93 showing the amount to be lost expressed both in £ million and £ per poll tax payer.

Mr. Portillo: The total amount of area protection grant payable in 1992-93 will be £308 million. A table showing the proposed reduction in area protection grant between 1991-92 and 1992-93 expressed in million pounds and pound per chargepayer is shown.

Reduction in area protection grant between 1991-92 and 1992-93

Local authority	*(£ million)*	*(£ adult)*
Greenwich	−4·1	−25
Hammersmith and Fulham	−3·0	−25
Lambeth	−0·4	−2
Lewisham	−4·2	−25
Southwark	−3·7	−25
Tower Hamlets	−3·3	−25
Wandsworth	−5·6	−25
Barking and Dagenham	−2·8	−25
Hillingdon	−3·0	−17
Hartlepool	−1·7	−25
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	−0·8	−7
Middlesbrough	−1·5	−15
Allerdale	−1·8	−25
Barrow-in-Furness	−1·5	−25
Carlisle	−1·5	−19
Copeland	−1·4	−25
Eden	−0·9	−25
Amber Valley	−2·2	−25
Bolsover	−1·4	−25

Local authority	(£ million)	(£ adult)
Chesterfield	−1·9	−25
Erewash	−2·1	−25
High Peak	−1·6	−25
North East Derbyshire	−1·9	−25
Torridge	−1·0	−25
Chester-le-Street	−0·7	−18
Derwentside	−1·6	−25
Durham	−0·5	−7
Easington	−1·9	−25
Sedgefield	−1·7	−25
Teesdale	−0·5	−25
Wear Valley	−1·3	−25
Boothferry	−1·2	−25
Cleethorpes	−1·1	−21
East Yorkshire	−1·6	−25
Great Grimsby	−1·4	−21
Holderness	−0·3	−8
Kingston upon Hull	−5·1	−25
Scunthorpe	−1·2	−25
Blackburn	−2·5	−25
Blackpool	−1·1	−10
Burnley	−1·7	−25
Hyndburn	−1·5	−25
Pendle	−1·6	−25
Rossendale	−1·2	−25
Alnwick	−0·5	−23
Berwick-upon-Tweed	−0·5	−25
Blyth Valley	−1·5	−25
Wansbeck	−1·2	−25
Craven	−1·0	−25
Ryedale	−0·3	−5
Scarborough	−2·1	−25
Selby	−0·4	−7
York	−2·0	−25
Ashfield	−2·1	−25
Mansfield	−1·7	−23
Stoke-on-Trent	−1·5	−8

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce the outcome of the consultation on the local government finance settlement for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: I hope to lay before the House tomorrow the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93, the Revenue Support Grant Distribution (Amendment) (No. 2) Report (England), the Population (England) Report (No. 3), and the Special Grant Report (No. 3); together these reports establish the amount of grant to be paid to local authorities and the basis of its distribution for 1992-93. I shall be sending copies of these reports to all authorities, together with a table showing the standard spending assessments and grant entitlement of each authority; these will also be placed in the Library and Vote Office. I should also make it clear that I stand firmly by my intentions for capping criteria which I announced on 26 November.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for all relevant local authorities *(a)* the post-16 component of their education standard spending assessment in 1991-92, *(b)* their actual expenditure in 1991-92 and *(c)* the proposed figure for 1992-93, showing aggregate totals for England expressed in £ million and constant prices.

Mr. Portillo: I have today placed a table in the Library showing the requested information on standard spending assessments. Comparable information on actual expenditure on post-16 education is not available.

Renovation Grants

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider special credit applications from local authorities to cover the open-ended cost of renovation grants.

Mr. Yeo: My Department has recently considered applications for a share of £25 million available as supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) to assist local authorities facing greatest pressure through demand for mandatory renovation grants in 1991-92. Bidding authorities were informed of our decisions in November 1991. For 1992-93, £30 million has been earmarked for issue as SCAs for mandatory grants. Local authorities will be invited to bid for a share of this reserve in due course.

Levy, London Boroughs

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the levy imposed on London boroughs by the London residuary body in 1991; and what is the expected levy for the coming year.

Mr. Key: The levy imposed on inner London boroughs for the year 1991-92 was £15·7 million. The LRB has indicated that the levy for the year 1992-93 will be of the order of £35 million to £40 million. This includes a substantial element to cover late rating adjustments, for which the former Inner London education authority had made inadequate provision.

Education Spending

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each education authority *(a)* their education standard spending assessment for 1991-92, *(b)* their budgeted expenditure in 1991-92 and *(c)* the proposed standard spending assessment for 1992-93, showing aggregate totals for England expressed in £ million and constant prices.

Mr. Portillo: I have today placed a table in the Library showing the requested information.

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by name the local authorities that have made representations to him about the law on Sunday trading.

Mr. Key: My Department has not received any such representations from local authorities.

Newsprint

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about the recycled content of newspapers published in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Following discussions with the Government, the newspaper publishers agreed in September 1991 to a target of 40 per cent. waste paper in United Kingdom newspapers by the year 2000. As part of that agreement, the industry agreed to produce audited annual figures for the recycled content of newspapers, starting with figures for 1990.

As agreed, the pulp and paper information centre has now provided figures for 1990. The total amount of waste paper used in United Kingdom newspapers accounted for 26·8 per cent. of newsprint consumed in the United Kingdom in 1990.

Waste paper used in newsprint produced in the United Kingdom accounted for 25·6 per cent. of all newsprint consumed by United Kingdom newspapers. Waste paper consumed by United Kingdom newsprint mills amounted to 67 per cent. of their total production.

The newspapers publishers have agreed that figures for 1991 will be released later this year.

We welcome the release of this information. We encourage newspaper groups to provide the same information for individual publications for which they are responsible.

Royal Parks

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, if he will make an announcement about the selection of contractors to carry out the garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine: I have selected the following contractors to carry out the garden and landscape maintenance work in the royal parks from 1 March 1992.

	Contractor
St. James's Park and the Green Park	Glendale Industries Ltd.
Kensington Gardens and Brompton Cemetery	Brophy PLC
Hyde Park	Serco Ltd.
Regents Park and Primrose Hill	Tyler Environmental Services Ltd.
Richmond Park	Glendale Industries Ltd.
Bushy Park	Glendale Industries Ltd.
Greenwich Park	Turfsoil Ltd.

After careful consideration of the tenders and some post-tender negotiations we are satisfied that the successful contractors will be able to provide the quality of work which we require. To meet that requirement we have chosen not to accept the lowest tender in some cases. Although the contract specification lays down higher standards than are currently achieved in the parks in some respects, the work will be carried out at less cost. Higher quality at lower cost is what this exercise is all about.

The successful contractors have started to conduct interviews with all staff currently employed in the parks who have applied for jobs with them. They will be required to employ apprentices in the parks who will receive their college training on a specially designed course with their tuition fees being paid for by the Department.

In addition I have decided to transfer responsibility for much on the day-to-day management of the parks from the Marsham street headquarters of the Department to the superintendents in the parks. With contracting out the number of civil servants retained at headquarters committed to the scrutiny of the parks will be reduced from 35 to 12. I have decided that the parks should be run by a chief executive and have arranged to recruit one by open competition.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on what grounds local authorities were excluded from bidding for the maintenance of the royal parks.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* Local authorities were not invited to tender for this work because the Government believe that they should not operate as trading bodies. Their role should be to enable their charge payers to enjoy high standards in those services for which they are responsible without necessarily providing them themselves. It is certainly not their role to enter into competition with the private sector.

RECHAR

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the Prime Minister's answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *469*, if he will set up an inquiry into the leaking of his letter to the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Scotland referring to the RECHAR programme.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 17 January 1992]:* Preliminary inquiries have proved inconclusive and I have accepted the advice I have been given that nothing would be gained from pursuing them.

Local Government Legislation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the number of Government amendments and *(b)* the topics covered which were tabled in the course of the parliamentary passage of (i) the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and (ii) the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ENERGY

Oil Seed Rape

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research has been conducted by his Department into the potential for conversion of oilseed rape into fuel; what contacts he has had with EC and non-EC countries which have undertaken research into this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department of Energy has considered the potential for conversion of biomass, including oilseed rape, into liquid fuels. The costs appear to be uncompetitive with the cost of competing fossil fuels.

The Department is aware of developments overseas through participation in the International Energy Agency bio-energy agreement and through its association with the European Commission's biomass energy programme.

The Department plans to evaluate further the potential for conversion of biomass into liquid fuels, taking account of the diversity, socio-economic and environmental benefits.

Petroleum Engineering Directorate

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish the guidelines for the independent inquiry being commissioned by his Department regarding the cost-effectiveness of relocating the petroleum engineering directorate in Aberdeen.

Mr. Wakeham: I am arranging for a copy of the terms of reference for the study to be placed in the Library of the House.

Plastic Piping

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what studies have been carried out of the consequences for the safe earthing of electric cookers and other appliances arising from the changeover from the supply of domestic water via lead piping to plastic.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand that, as part of the national water metering trials, the Department of the Environment commissioned a study to investigate the change in the earthing characteristics of domestic properties when work is carried out on the water supply pipe in order to install an external water meter.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the individuals and organisations retained to advise him or his Department on electricity privatisation, giving in each case the commencement and termination date of their contract and the nature of the advice they supplied.

Mr. Wakeham: The following advisers were retained in connection with the restructuring and privatisation of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales:

Adviser	*Area*	*From*	*To*
Kleinwort Benson	Financial	July 1987	April 1991
Touche Ross	Regulatory/Accounting/Audit services	August 1987	Continuing
Slaughter & May	Legal	August 1987	Continuing
Merz & McLellan	Technical	August 1987	November 1990
Professor Littlechild	Regulatory	November 1987	May 1989
James Capel	Lead Brokers	May 1988	March 1991
Rowe and Pitman	Brokers	May 1988	March 1991
Price Waterhouse	Systems audit/Logistics/Reporting accountants	June 1988	Continuing
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Reporting accountants	June 1988	December 1990
Peat Marwick McLintock	Reporting accountants	June 1988	December 1990
Binder Hamlyn	Reporting accountants	June 1988	December 1990
Ernst & Whinney	Reporting accountants	June 1988	December 1990
Coopers & Lybrand	Reporting accountants	June 1988	December 1990
Spicer & Oppenheim	Reporting accountants	June 1988	December 1990
Lowe Bell	Marketing and Public Relations	July 1988	April 1991
Lloyds Bank	Receiving bank and Registrars operations	August 1988	February 1990
British Market Research Bureau	Market research	August 1988	February 1990
Davis Polk & Wardwell	US legal	September 1988	Continuing
Russel Reynolds	Executive selection	December 1988	February 1989
Goldman Sachs	US financial	December 1988	Continuing
Osler Renault	Canadian legal	February 1989	Continuing
The VPI Group	Joint marketing	February 1989	January 1990
Anderson Mori & Rabinowitz	Jananese legal	March 1989	Continuing
Wood Gundy	Canadian financial	March 1989	Continuing
Nomura	Japanese financial	March 1989	Continuing
Saxton Bampfylde	Executive selection	March 1989	October 1989
Jones Lang Wootton	Property adviser	March 1989	February 1990
Nuclear Services Group	Decommissioning costs	April 1989	April 1989
Williams Lea	Printing advice	April 1989	Continuing
Credit Suisse First Boston	European financial	June 1989	Continuing
Lamb and Edge	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Grimley J. R. Eve	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Gerald Eve	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Knight Frank Rutley	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Weatherall Green & Smith	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Debenham Tewson & Cheshire	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Hartnell Taylor & Cook	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Connell Hallum & Brackett	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Matthews & Goodman	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Cook & Arkwright	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Bernard Thorpe	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Henry Butcher	Property valuers	June 1989	April 1990
Debenham Tewson & Chinnocks	Property valuers	July 1989	March 1991
Edward Erdman	Property valuers	July 1989	January 1991
Coopers & Lybrand	Salary advisers	July 1989	April 1990
UKAEA	AGR output	September 1989	October 1989
Lloyd Northover	Design consultants	January 1990	April 1990

Adviser	Area	From	To
R. L. Associates	Setting X for area boards	January 1990	February 1990
Dewe Rogerson	Marketing & Public Relations	February 1990	Continuing
Lincoln Hannah	Press cutting service	February 1990	April 1991
Russell Reynolds	Executive selection	February 1990	July 1990
Imagination	Roadshow organisers	May 1990	April 1991
WCRS	Flotation advertising	May 1990	December 1990
J. Henry Schroder Wagg	Trade sale	June 1990	August 1990
John Chiene	Pricing	June 1990	March 1991
J. Henry Schroder Wagg	Underwriters	September 1990	November 1990
Smith New Court	Brokers for the Generators	January 1991	March 1991

Notes:
(i) Names given are as at time of appointment.
(ii) Where companies worked in more than one area, or under more than one contract, dates given are for commencement of earliest task and completion of latest.

In addition, a number of operational contractors have been or are continuing to be employed to provide support for the remaining elements of the sale, for example, the instalment arrangements.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the fees to be paid out in 1991-92 for advice on electricity privatisation; and what estimate has been made for 1992-93.

Mr. Wakeham: It is estimated that Government expenditure in 1991-92 on fees for advice on electricity privatisation will be approximately £7 million. Details of expected expenditure in 1992-93 will in due course be published, in the usual way, in the supply estimates.

Coal Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the individuals and organisations retained by him or his Department to advise on coal privatisation, giving in each case the commencement date of their contract and the nature of the advice supplied.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested is as follows:

N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.	30 May 1991	Financial matters
Touche Ross	12 June 1991	Accountancy matters
Clifford Chance	19 June 1991	Legal matters
Wardell Armstrong, John T. Boyd	5 August 1991	Technical and mining matters

I also have in mind to appoint a consultant to advise on coal mining safety matters, and expect to make an announcement on this soon.

Vale of Pickering (Gas)

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information his Department has received in respect of the recent further gas discovery by Kelt UK Ltd. at Haygate lane in the Vale of Pickering, including the nature of the gas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Preliminary pressure testing of Kelt's Pickering No. 1 well indicates a significant accumulation of gas. No gas has yet been produced from the well, and it is thus not yet possible to establish the chemical make-up of the gas. The well is currently suspended.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the total fees paid out for advice on electricity privatisation in 1986-87 and each year since at current prices.

Mr. Wakeham: No expenditure was incurred by the Government in 1986-87 in respect of advice on the restructuring and privatisation of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales. For subsequent years, Government expenditure on advisory fees was as follows:

	£ Million
1987-88	0·8
1988-89	5·5
1989-90	12·2
1990-91	51·9

South Africa (Oil Exports)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) by what mechanism the Government are honouring their commitments with regard to crude oil exports to South Africa made under the 1985 package of EC sanctions now that the guidelines of 31 January 1979 covering the United Kingdom's crude oil exports are no longer in force;

(2) when he expects the investigation into the alleged breach of the United Kingdom's guidelines prohibiting crude oil exports to South Africa by the tanker Almare Terza to be completed;

(3) what factors have affected the time taken by his officials to investigate the alleged breach of the United Kingdom's guidelines prohibiting crude oil exports to South Africa by the tanker Almare Terza.

Mr. Wakeham: As I made clear in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) on 8 March 1991, *Official Report*, column *301*, the Government expect companies to abide by the 1985 EC measures against South Africa. Notice has been issued to the industry advising them of the continued existence of the ban. The investigation into the alleged shipment of United Kingdom continental shelf oil to South Africa on the tanker Almare Terza has proved complex and time consuming. It has been established that the cargo changed ownership at least five times on the international market. No response has, however, proved obtainable from the last identified owner, International Transportation Company based in the Cayman islands, and other inquiries have proved inconclusive.

Dounreay

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the Atomic Energy Authority's investigation into the nuclear material accountancy discrepancy at Dounreay.

Mr. Wakeham: I have now received the report from AEA Technology into the nuclear material accountancy discrepancy at Dounreay. The investigation by the Atomic Energy Authority has confirmed the preliminary view that the discrepancy has not involved safety or environmental hazards and that there are no grounds for believing that security procedures were deficient, or that any diversion of material has occurred.

A re-assessment of the discrepancy has reduced the earlier reported "Material-Unaccounted-For" (MUF) of 11 kg U-235 (10·2 kg U-235 in high enriched uranium and 1·1 kg U-235 in low enriched uranium) to approximately 3 kg total U-235. The new figure takes into account the discharge of liquid waste containing uranium, and the re-assessment of solid waste and other materials. A more refined measurement was also made of the hold-up of uranium in the plant.

The report identifies a number of areas where it will be necessary to improve management procedures, accountancy, and record keeping. The Atomic Energy Authority has accepted all the recommendations made in the investigation report and has taken action to implement them. I have asked my officials to monitor implementation of the report's recommendations by the Atomic Energy Authority.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Pollution, Russia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to provide assistance to the Russian Federation to reduce the problems of social dislocation and pollution arising from the 10 previously unknown Russian cities, including Arzamas-16 and Tomsk-7; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In Russia our bilateral assistance through the know-how fund is concentrated in four priority sectors—banking and finance, energy, food distribution and employment services. We are already implementing several pilot projects in Moscow and St. Petersburg, designed to address the social consequences of the transformation to a market economy. Assistance through the European Community and through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is of growing importance. We will continue to consider the most effective ways of providing assistance through the various channels.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 23 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today.

Honours

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if he has any proposals to review the present honours system; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

EC Heads of State

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement as to the effect of the Maastricht agreement and the Single European Act upon the powers, role and future of the Crown and the heads of state of other European Community members.

The Prime Minister: The powers, role and future of the Crown remain unaffected by the Single European Act and the treaty on European union agreed at Maastricht. The position of heads of state of other member states of the Community depends on their respective constitutional arrangements.

Farmland

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has any specific plans to reduce the protection to farmland currently in operation through the planning system; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: New planning policy guidance was set out on 22 January at columns *203-4* in a reply from my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). This affirms the Government's commitment to protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land. Planning authorities should also weigh environmental considerations, including any special designation of the area, and economic factors, including the need for diversification to provide wider employment opportunities in rural areas, in preparing development plans and deciding planning applications.

Legislation (Repeal)

Mr. Tebbit: To ask the Prime Minister under which sections of the treaty of Rome, as amended by the Maastricht agreement, the powers of Parliament to repeal legislation enacted by its predecessors are curtailed.

The Prime Minister: The powers of Parliament to repeal legislation enacted by its predecessors are not curtailed by the treaty of Rome, either in its present form or as amended by the treaty on European union agreed at the Maastricht European Council.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Young Claimants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the additional annual cost to the Exchequer of providing income support for 16 and 17-year-olds at the same rates as *(a)* 18 to 24-year-olds and *(b)* people aged 25 years and over.

Mr. Jack: Based on caseload information for 1990, the best available estimate of the cost of increasing the rate of income support for 16 and 17-year-olds who satisfy current entitlement conditions is around an annual £50 million if the rate paid to 16 to 17-year-olds is increased to that paid to 18 to 24-year-olds, and around £170 million if the rate is increased to the full adult rate. Increasing the

rate paid to 16 to 17-year-olds to the full adult rate would require that the rate paid to 18 to 24-year-olds be increased to the same figure, at an additional estimated cost of £280 million; or a total cost of £450 million.

Income Support

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the total number of households, including dependants, in receipt of income support, by tenure.

Miss Widdecombe: The information is not available in the form requested.

Disability

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether claimants with a disability who are receiving assistance with mortgage interest payments will retain that assistance if upon taking up a job they qualify for disability working allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Disability working allowance (DWA) will not include help with mortgage payments. However, no one will be obliged to claim and of those who choose to do so only a small number will be worse off than if they remained on income support. We estimate that about 10,000 DWA recipients will have mortgages and will be better off on DWA.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether employed status ET or YT trainees, or self-employed people, with a disability are eligible to claim disability working allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: People with a disability who are self-employed or working for an employer, including those on employment training and youth training schemes with employed status, are eligible to claim disability working allowance if they work for 16 or more hours a week.

Industrial Services Consortium

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many contracts the Industrial Services Consortium of Bradford has been awarded by his Department in the last two years, to date; if he will review a decision taken by the purchasing and supply directorate to concentrate leaflet work at Canons park; what reduction in employment of disabled people will result at ISCO 5 if this decision is approved; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The purchasing and supplying of leaflets is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Robert Ingram

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when social fund inspectors are to conclude their review of the refusal to pay community care grant to Mr. Robert Ingram, of Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the social fund commissioner that the review to which the hon. Member refers was completed on 15 January. Mr. Ingram has been notified of the social fund inspector's decision.

Housing Costs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the numbers of claimants of income support in respect of mortgage interest both nationally and in each standard region, for 1989, 1990 and the most recent date in 1991, distinguishing between claimants who are *(a)* unemployed, *(b)* economically inactive, including pensioners or long-term sick and *(c)* claimants who are working less than 24 hours a week.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The information requested is in the tables:

Regions	*Unemployed*	*Others*	*Part time work*	*Total*
1990	82,000	210,000	18,000	310,000
North Eastern	14,000	28,000	3,000	45,000
London North	14,000	35,000	2,000	51,000
South Western	6,000	17,000	2,000	25,000
Wales	4,000	19,000	2,000	26,000
Midlands	14,000	35,000	3,000	52,000
North Western	14,000	33,000	2,000	50,000
Scotland	5,000	9,000	1,000	14,000
London South	10,000	34,000	3,000	47,000
1989	84,000	179,000	17,000	281,000
North Eastern	16,000	26,000	2,000	45,000
London North	14,000	28,000	2,000	44,000
South Western	5,000	16,000	3,000	23,000
Wales	6,000	15,000	1,000	22,000
Midlands	12,000	29,000	2,000	44,000
North Western	16,000	32,000	4,000	52,000
Scotland	5,000	9,000	1,000	15,000
London South	9,000	24,000	2,000	35,000

Notes:

1. All figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
2. Due to rounding the sum of individual entries may not equal the totals given.
3. The figures for part time work include relevant cases from both the unemployed and other groups.

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries 1989 and 1990.

Figures for 1991 are not yet available.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Trawlers

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many trawlers his Department has examined in the last year to ensure the physical output of their engines matches the details in their official documents, in respect of those with de-rated engines within the 221 kW limit.

Mr. Curry: None. There are no currently available and practicable means of verifying recorded engine power in the course of inspections at sea. My Department is considering whether there is any way of overcoming this difficulty.

Decommissioning

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to include details of a United Kingdom decommissioning scheme in the submission to the EC multi-annual guidance programme.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Minister has indicated that he is prepared to consider decommissioning as part of a package including effort control. The industry has put forward proposals in response to this invitation and fisheries departments are considering the options but no decision has yet been taken.

It is too early to say what will be included in the United Kingdom's submission on the multi-annual guidance programme.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the locations of all the cold stores in the United Kingdom where BSE-confirmed cattle carcases have been stored or are being stored, giving for each cold store the number of BSE-confirmed carcases which have been stored there in each year; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement about the legislative conditions imposed upon the storage of BSE-confirmed carcases in cold stores.

Mr. Gummer: BSE carcases are stored for short periods only prior to transportation to incineration plants and at the plants to even out the flow to the incinerators.

There are two dedicated storage centres in the United Kingdom, both in Devon. These centres are used only for BSE carcases. They are operating within local authority regulations and are bound by contractual conditions with the Ministry. The throughput of carcases at these centres is strictly controlled and regular inspections are carried out by the state veterinary service.

In addition to these centres refrigerated lorries are also sometimes used (in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Leicestershire, Lancashire and Derbyshire) for temporary storage while awaiting full loads for transportation.

Information on the number of carcases stored is not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Redwood: In the period since 1 April 1989 Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte has been engaged by the Department in connection with projects and studies on the subjects listed. Further details, including details of the costs of these projects, are commercially confidential.

Subject of Assignments

Scrutiny of demand and funding for Departmental Central Services
Environmental/Safety Controls study on Chlorinated Substances Markets
Study on barriers to takeovers in EC
CFC Market Study
Computing Services Industry study
Managing into the 90s programme: Review of material
Revision of Managing into the 90s newsletter
Efficiency/effectiveness of proposed accounting systems
Inward Investment review
Financial viability of the Management Charter Initiative
Information system strategy Study for Information Technology Division
Study of safety-related computer-controlled systems
Market Assessment Study of computer misuse
BTG appointment of Reporting Accountants
Work programme following local authority Regulation of Business Seminar
Conference: Selling to Firms and Industries once in the public sector
Study into Radiocommunications Agency's networking requirements
Review of Radiocommunications Agency's licensing procedures
Citizen's Charter and Local Authority Regulation
Study of Ozone depleting substances
Local Authority regulation of business
Research into knock-on effects of inward investment
UK Australian trade investment study
Internal scrutiny of fairs and promotion branch: survey of chambers of commerce, trade associations etc.
Local government regulation of business; development of specifications for alternative approaches to the evaluation of the regulation of business by local authorities
Local government regulation of business; conference between business and local government
Industry profile of printed cartons in EC: market study

Auditing Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to prevent auditing firms from performing actuarial tasks for their audit clients.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the sections of the Companies Acts which relate to the selling by an auditor of non-auditing services to his audit clients.

Mr. Redwood: The relevant provision in the Companies Act 1989 is paragraph 7(1) of schedule 11, which requires recognised supervisory bodies to have adequate rules and practices regarding the professional integrity and independence of company auditors. In addition, the Companies Act 1985 (Disclosure of Remuneration for

Non-Audit Work) Regulations 1991, made under section 390B of the Companies Act 1985, require companies that are not small or medium sized to disclose in their accounts the remuneration of their auditors and their associates for non-audit work for the company and its associated undertakings.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what rules he has approved relating to the action which the recognised supervisory bodies are required to take in respect of auditing firms whose standards are found to be deficient.

Mr. Redwood: Before recognising supervisory bodies for company auditors under part II of the Companies Act 1989, my right hon. Friend was satisfied that each had procedures for maintaining auditors' competence, adequate arrangements and resources for monitoring and enforcing compliance with its rules, effective arrangements for the investigation of complaints, and fair and reasonable rules and practices relating to membership, eligibility to accept appointments, and discipline.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy to require the recognised supervisory bodies to publish the names of the firms found to have poor auditing standards.

Mr. Redwood: The recognised supervisory bodies have undertaken to publish the names of auditors whose performance has been the subject of adverse disciplinary findings.

Instruments of Torture

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are currently taken by his Department to prevent the export of instruments of torture.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make it his policy to include exports of equipment used for executions within the remit of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ban any exports from the United Kingdom of any equipment designed for use in the torture or ill treatment of prisoners or the carrying out of executions.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers he has to control the manufacture, sale and export of equipment used for execution and torture; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what is his policy on the manufacture and export of prisoner disorientation equipment;

(2) what is his policy on the exports of instruments of torture including electronic torture chambers.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what export licences are required prior to the export of equipment which could be used for torture or execution;

(2) if he will introduce a ban on the manufacture of equipment which can only be used for torture or for the purpose of execution.

(3) if he will press the European Commission for further European action to control the export of equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression or torture purposes only.

(4) if he will consider taking further measures to prevent British companies exporting equipment which can only be used for torture or for the purpose of execution.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department has received a copy of the Amnesty International report "Repression Trade (UK) Ltd" to which we will respond after careful study. The Government deplore the use of any equipment knowingly exported for the use of torture and other such violations of human rights. The Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991 provides for the control of the export of leg irons, shackles and gang chains. I confirmed on 17 October *(Official Report,* cols *200-201)* the Government's long-held policy that no exports of these items will be permitted.

I announced at the same time measures to control certain oversized handcuffs with a linking chain which were usable as leg irons. Electronic equipment of the type which, it is alleged, has been used for torture is widely available and has many innocent uses. We will also consider Amnesty International's request for controls on the export of death penalty equipment.

There is no legislation controlling the manufacture of this equipment.

Company Directors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the individuals criticised in his Department's report on *(a)* Pergamon Press and *(b)* Kina Holdings are still permitted to act as company directors and auditors.

Mr. Redwood: These reports were published many years ago and other than the fact of Mr. Maxwell's death, I do not have information about the present status of those mentioned in the reports. The hon. Member will be aware that the disqualification provisions were enhanced as part of the Government's insolvency law reforms of 1985 and are now consolidated in the Company Directors Disqualification Act.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has made to the European Commission concerning the United Kingdom auditing industry.

Mr. Redwood: Auditing matters have been discussed in connection with negotiations over the fifth draft company law directive.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will investigate the level of audit fees in Britain.

Mr. Redwood: No.

James Ferguson Holdings plc

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many writs he has issued against the advisers to James Ferguson Holdings plc.

Mr. Redwood: One.

Accidents at Work

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to require companies to publish their work accident record in the notes to the accounts.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Bankers' Fees

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to ask the Office of Fair Trading to investigate the fees charged by merchant banks during contested takeovers.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Textiles and Clothing

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet representatives of the textile and clothing industry to discuss the effect of the recession.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Secretary of State and I met with representatives of the textile and clothing industry on 8 January to discuss the Uruguay round. There are no plans at present for a further meeting.

Expo 92

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government has taken to ensure that the interests of the United Kingdom are properly represented at Expo 92 in Seville.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The Government have committed £25 million towards the British presence at Expo 92. This is more than was provided for any previous world exposition. The British pavilion is an outstanding design by Nicholas Grimshaw, an excellent example of the high quality of British engineering, including a spectacular wall of water. Inside, its exciting exhibition demonstrates British innovation and discovery. A wide range of cultural events has been organised for the six month period of Expo 92 and this, together with the pavilion, will show our originality in arts and culture.

WALES

Fish Farms

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department holds on the impact of escapees from fish farms diluting the gene pool of wild species, with particular reference to salmon.

Mr. David Hunt: There is only one marine salmon farm in Wales and any escape of farmed salmon is therefore unlikely to have a significant effect on the stocks of wild salmon in Welsh rivers.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each of the last 10 years the number of fish farms in Wales indicating the location of each one by the use of ordnance survey grid reference numbers.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of fish farms in Wales in each year since 1986 was as follows:

	Number
1986	55
1987	60
1988	65
1989	75
1990	70
1991	68

Data were not collected before 1986. Fish farmers are not required, when registering with my Department, to give the ordnance survey grid references of their sites.

Pembroke Power Station

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions relating to the choice of fuel for the Pembroke power station he has had with the Countryside Council for Wales regarding the advice received from English Nature with regard to the impact of orimulsion on the pollution-sensitive species.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. The proposal to extend Pembroke power station (to enable it to burn orimulsion) is currently being considered by the Secretary of State for Energy under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. I understand that the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) has lodged an objection with the Department of Energy against the proposal. Concurrently Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) is considering an application from National Power under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 for authorisation to burn orimulsion fuel at Pembroke. As one of the statutory consultees, CCW is being consulted by HMIP about the application.

In these circumstances it would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to hold discussions with CCW on this matter, particularly in view of his statutory appellate role in respect of applications under the Environmental Protection Act.

Housing

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will respond to the fifth report of the Welsh Affairs Committee, Session 1990-91, "Affordable Housing" (HC 581).

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I am pleased to announce that the response has been published today.

Student Support

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money was made available to students in Wales through the access funds in the academic year 1990-91; and how many students benefited.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Access funds totalling £600,000 were distributed by the Welsh Office to further and higher education colleges outside the university sector in Wales for the academic year 1990-91. Allocations to individual institutions were made on the basis of eligible student numbers. According to returns from institutions £563,183 in access funds was actually disbursed to 1,930 students, which amounts to an average of about £300 per student

assisted. The Universities Funding Council is responsible for the allocation of access funds to colleges of the University of Wales.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

International Organisations

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the name and nationality of the director, secretary-general or president, as applicable of *(a)* the Commission of the European Communities, *(b)* the World bank, *(c)* the International Monetary Fund, *(d)* the European bank for reconstruction and development, *(e)* the secretariat of the Council of Europe, *(f)* the secretariat of the Western European Union, *(g)* the secretariat of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its new institutions, *(h)* the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and (i) the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade; and if he will make a statement on whether any British citizens are being advanced for these posts when vacancies arise.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: *(a)* The president of the European Commission is Jacques Delors, a French national. The president is appointed from among the members of the Commission by common accord, and British citizens will be advanced for the post when appropriate.

(b) The president of the World bank is Lewis Preston, a United States national. The post is customarily filled by the United States.

(c) The managing director of the International Monetary Fund is Michel Camdessus, a French national. The post will not become vacant until 1997. A decision about a possible British successor will be made nearer the time.

(d) The president of the European bank for reconstruction and development is Jacques Attali, a French national. The post will not become vacant until 1995, and a decision about a possible British successor will be made nearer the time.

(e) The Secretary General of the Council of Europe is Catherine Lalumiere, a French national. British candidates are advanced for posts in the secretariat as appropriate.

(f) The Secretary General of the Western European Union is W. F. Van Eekelen, of the Netherlands. A Benelux national has always held the post of Secretary-General of the WEU.

(g) The director of the secretariat of the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe is Nils Eliasson, a Swedish national; the director of the Conflict Prevention Centre is Bent Rosenthal, a Danish national; the director of the Office of Free Elections is Lucchino Cortese, an Italian national. These posts will become vacant in 1994. A decision on whether to advance British candidates will be made nearer the time.

(h) The Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is Jean-Claude Paye, a French national. The post will become vacant in 1994. A decision on whether to advance a British candidate will be made nearer the time.

(i) The Director-General of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is Arthur Dunkel, a Swiss national. The post may become vacant this year, but there is no British candidate.

EC Regional Policy

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *615*, which of the objective 1 regions of the European Community regional policy will not benefit from the cohesion funds agreed at the Maastricht summt; whether Her Majesty's Government requested the inclusion of Northern Ireland as a beneficiary of the cohesion fund; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The following objective 1 regions will not benefit from the cohesion fund: the French overseas departments, Corsica, Abruzzi, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Apulia, Sardinia, Sicily and Northern Ireland.

The cohesion fund benefits member states not regions, with a per capita GNP of less than 90 per cent. of the Community average. Northern Ireland is not a Community member state and so cannot qualify in its own right. The United Kingdom's per capita GNP is too high for it to qualify. Northern Ireland's objective 1 status is not affected by the cohesion fund. It will continue to benefit substantially from the three principal structural funds.

Mrs. Nazir Begum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Mrs. Nazir Begum, born in 1931, applied to the post in Islamabad to visit her nephew in the United Kingdom; when the letter, dated 19 November 1990, from solicitors in Bradford, inquiring about the application was received by the post; when a decision on the application is to be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In the absence of any information on this case held in the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I have asked our high commission in Islamabad for a full report. I will give the hon. Member a substantive reply as soon as possible.

Official Visits

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his visits to Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Russia.

Mr. Hurd: I visited Alma Ata (Kazakhstan) on 18 and 19 January, Kiev (Ukraine) on 19 January, and Moscow (Russian Federation) on 19 and 20 January.

In each country, I held talks with the President and with Ministers responsible for foreign affairs and economic matters. I also met the Ukrainian Defence Minister, and Marshall Shaposhnikov, Commander in Chief of the Defence Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The main objectives of my visits were to discuss problems affecting stability and security, including the secure control and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology; to assess the economic situation in preparation for the Washington conference which I shall

be attending on 22 and 23 January; and to develop bilateral relations in their new form following the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and recognition of former republics as independent countries.

In all three capitals, I was assured that the agreements of Alma Ata and Minsk of the Commonwealth of Independent States for strategic weapons and forces to be held under central control on behalf of that Commonwealth were being maintained. Russia, continuing the international responsibilities of the former Soviet Union, is a party to the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty. I discussed with the leaders of Kazakhstan and Ukraine the importance of the early accession of their countries to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty as non-nuclear weapon states. The leaders of both countries reiterated their commitment to the eventual removal of all nuclear weapons from their territories. Russia is co-ordinating the centralisation of tactical nuclear weapons before they are destroyed. For the removal of strategic weapons to Russia a deadline of 1994 has been agreed. This is a considerable task, but I was reasonably encouraged by what I heard.

I was pleased also to be told that progress is being made in negotiating agreed solutions to complex problems over the division of forces, although the process clearly has some way to go.

My interlocutors were conscious of the critical importance of all of these questions for future stability within their countries and more widely. I have told them of our readiness to provide advice and assistance. NATO Ministers agreed in December on the principle of offering such help. I think that the leaders I met would welcome help in the safe disposal of surplus weapons.

All the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States face an acutely difficult economic situation. I expressed support for policies of economic reform, and underlined the importance of moving towards integration into the world economic system, including membership of the international financial institutions. I expressed concern about the risk of protectionism and trade barriers between the member states of the Commonwealth and was given detailed accounts of problems arising from the legacy of the command economy, from price liberalisation, and from shortages of food, animal feedstock and consumer goods. My interlocutors expressed appreciation of the support being given by the United Kingdom and the European Community, and pressed for these efforts to be sustained and reinforced. They hoped that the Washington conference will lead to further international action.

In Kazakhstan, I issued with the Foreign Minister a joint statement on the development of bilateral relations. We agreed to exchange diplomatic missions, and to build on the contacts which have already taken place, including commercial exchanges. In Ukraine, I introduced the new British charge d'affaires, and discussed prospects for the opening of embassies in Kiev and London. In Moscow, I prepared in my talks with President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev for the visit to London by President Yeltsin on 30 January, at the invitation of the Prime Minister. We also discussed the meeting of the United Nations Security Council at summit level, which is to take place in New York on the following day.

It was helpful to have this early opportunity to discuss with the leaders of the three largest states in the new Commonwealth the massive political and economic transformation which they are undertaking. It is not surprising that there are strains within the Commonwealth, and much hard bargaining is taking place; but there is also a willingness to find answers. We are developing a close dialogue with the different leaders. They are following a tough-minded approach to political change and economic reform. However difficult the road, they seem determined to continue their course. They need the help of the international community, and it will be in all of our interests to continue to offer this. I therefore assured the leaders of these three countries of the determination of the United Kingdom to build close relations with them.

Namibia

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what extradition arrangements apply between the United Kingdom and Namibia.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

As yet no extradition arrangements have been established between the United Kingdom and Namibia.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Kidney Patients

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the intake of new patients per million of the population in Northern Ireland in 1990 for kidney treatment.

Mr. Hanley: In 1990 the intake of new patients for treatment of end stage renal failure was 62 per million of the population. This does not include patients admitted for other forms of kidney treatment.

Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the hon. Hugh O'Neill was appointed as chairman of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.; and how many persons have served as chief executive of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. since that date.

Mr. Needham: Mr. O'Neill was appointed in July 1986 since when three people have served as chief executive.

EMPLOYMENT

Bridging Allowance

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each region and for Great Britain as a whole, separately for male and female, a table showing for each month since October 1988 *(a)* the number of young people who were receiving bridging allowance, *(b)* the number who began claiming bridging allowance and *(c)* the number of young people who ceased claiming bridging allowance; what were the numbers of those young people who exhausted their bridging allowance payments because they had used up their eight week entitlement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Disability

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what conditions a person with a disability has to satisfy if they wish to be registered under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944; what medical evidence they have to produce; what procedures exist for an appeal against a refusal to register; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: A person who wishes to register as disabled under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 must meet a number of eligibility conditions, which are set out in the 1944 Act, as amended by the 1958 Act, and in regulations made under the 1944 Act. The main conditions, briefly, are as follows:

(1) the person must, as a result of some mental, physical or sensory disability, be substantially handicapped in obtaining or retaining employment or self employment which would otherwise be suited to the person's age, experience and qualifications;
(2) the disability must be likely to last for at least 12 months; and
(3) the person must want to work and have a reasonable prospect of obtaining and retaining suitable employment or self employment.

Medical evidence is not always required to help determine eligibility to register, for example if an individual has an obvious disability. When medical evidence is needed it may be obtained, with the individual's agreement, from a number of sources, including the hospital consultant if the individual is receiving treatment at a hospital. Alternatively, arrangements may be made, by agreement, for the individual to be examined by the regional medical service. Employed applicants for registration may, if they wish, obtain a medical report from their family practitioner.

There is no provision in the Act for a formal appeals procedure where an application to register is refused. However, the Employment Service's disablement resettlement officers, who make decisions on applications, may not reject an application without first referring it for advice to a panel of the local committee for the employment of people with disabilities. Where applications are referred for advice to a panel, the applicant is invited to attend the meeting and put his comments to the panel. In practice, disablement resettlement officers will also consider any representations made by an individual whose application for registration has been refused.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment under what circumstances disabled persons can withdraw themselves from registration under the Disabled Persons (Employment) At 1944; in what other circumstances a disabled person's registration can lapse; if people can appeal against a decision to de-register them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The 1944 Act provides for the volunary withdrawal from registration at any time on receipt, by the Employment Service's disablement resettlement officer, of a written request to do so.

Registration is for a specified period, usually up to 10 years. However, registrations may be renewed, on application, if the eligibility conditions are still being met.

The Act also provides for an individual's registration to be terminated if he or she ceases to meet the eligibility conditions. This provision is rarely used.

There is no provision under the Act for people to appeal against a decision to de-register them before the specified period has elapsed. However, before such a decision is taken, the matter must be referred for advice to a panel of the local committee for the employment of people with disabilities, and the panel's recommendation must be referred, for a decision, to the Employment Service's regional office. Where such matters are referred for advice to a panel, the applicant is invited to attend the meeting and to put his comments to the panel.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has about the number of people out of work who have a health problem which limits the type of work they can do, for each year since 1987, in each region and for Great Britain as a whole.

Mr. Jackson: The available estimates from the "Labour Force Survey" are given in the following table.

People not in employment[1] who have any health problems or disabilities which limit the kind of paid work they can do

Thousands

	1987	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Great Britain	2,359	2,376	2,521	2,472
Northern	165	187	190	202
Yorkshire and Humberside	237	233	270	272
East Midlands	171	162	153	150
East Anglia	66	65	66	72
South East	569	549	564	526
GLC	256	257	256	249
Rest of South East	313	292	308	278
South West	167	170	168	154
West Midlands	242	223	239	243
North West	318	331	367	363
Wales	194	199	209	197
Scotland	232	255	295	292

Source: Labour Force Survey
[1] Economically inactive and unemployed (on ILO definition).

Industrial Disputes

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many working days per thousand workers have been lost in *(a)* Northern Ireland and *(b)* Great Britain in each of the last five years as a result of industrial disputes.

Mr. Forth: The data for working days lost per thousand workers[1] as a result of industrial disputes in Northern Ireland and Great Britain are as follows:

	Northern Ireland	*Great Britain*
December 1990 to November 1991[2]	32	35
Calendar Year		
1990	34	84
1989	68	185
1988	104	168
1987	228	163
1986	60	91

[1] Workers are expressed as employees in employment, based on June 1991 estimates.
[2] Latest 12 month period for which data are available. 1991 data are provisional and subject to revision, usually upwards.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Health and Safety

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether the European Community directive on health and safety at work covers the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply.

It is the policy of the House authorities to comply with all legislative provisions relating to health and safety at work.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Lord President of the Council when he expects to publish the Government response to the third report from the Procedure Committee, Session 1990-91, on parliamentary questions.

Mr. MacGregor: I am still considering the report and will reply in due course.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Colleges

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all colleges, giving their names and addresses, in the area of each local education authority, which are proposed should be freed from local education authority control under the terms of the Further and Higher Education Bill [*Lords*].

Mr. Eggar: On the basis of current information, I append a list of colleges in England maintained or assisted by local education authorities that would transfer automatically or be designated under the Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament. Addresses are available from the "Education Authorities Directory and Annual 1991", a copy of which is in the Library. A definitive list must await an order under the eventual legislation, and would also reflect organisational changes between now and April 1993.

Questions relating to further education in Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

List of all maintained further education and sixth form colleges in England by local authority

GREATER LONDON

Barking and Dagenham
Barking College of Technology

Barnet
Barnet College of Further Education
Hendon College of Further Education
Woodhouse Sixth Form College

Bexley
Erith College of Technology

Brent
Brent New College

Bromley
Bromley College of Technology
Orpington College of Further Education

Croydon
Croydon College
Purley Sixth Form College
John Ruskin Sixth Form College

Ealing
Acton College
Pathway Further Education Centre
Southall College of Technology
Norwood Hall Institute of Horticulture/Education

Enfield
Capel Manor Horticulture and Environmental Centre
Enfield College
Southgate College

Haringey
The College of North East London

Harrow
Elm Park College
Greenhill College
Weald College
St. Dominic's Sixth Form College (VA)

Havering
Havering College of Further and Higher Education

Hillingdon
Uxbridge College

Hounslow
Hounslow Borough College

Kingston upon Thames
Kingston College of Further Education

Merton
Merton College
Wimbledon School of Art
Merton Sixth Form College

Newham
Newham Community College
New Cumberland Sixth Form College (VA)
(due to open September 1992)

Redbridge
Redbridge College of Further Education

Richmond upon Thames
Richmond upon Thames College

Sutton
Carshalton College

Waltham Forest
Waltham Forest College
Leyton Sixth Form College
Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College

INNER LONDON
Camden
Kingsway College

Greenwich
Woolwich College

Hackney
Cordwainers Technical College
Hackney College

Hammersmith and Fulham
Hammersmith and West London College

Islington
City and East London College
North London College

Kensington and Chelsea
St. Charles Roman Catholic Sixth Form College (VA)

Lambeth
Brixton College of Further Education
South London College
Vauxhall College of Building and Further Education

Lewisham
Lewisham College

Southwark
Southwark College

Tower Hamlets
Tower Hamlets College

Wandsworth
South Thames College
Westminster College
St. Francis Xavier Sixth Form College (VA)

Westminster
City of Westminster College

OTHER LEAs IN ENGLAND
Avon
Brunel College of Technology
City of Bath College
Filton College
Norton Radstock College of Further Education
Nursery Nurses College of Further Education
Soundwell College
South Bristol College
Weston-super-Mare College of Further Education
St. Brendans Sixth Form College (VA)

Barnsley
Barnsley College
Northern College

Bedfordshire
Barnfield College
Bedford College of Higher Education
Dunstable College
Luton Sixth Form College

Berkshire
Newbury College of Further Education
Windsor and Maidenhead College of Further Education
Reading College of Technology
Langley College of Further Education
Bracknell College of Further Education
Berkshire College of Art and Design
Berkshire College of Agriculture

Birmingham
Birmingham College of Food, Tourism and Creative Studies
Bourneville College of Further Education
Brooklyn College
East Birmingham College
Hall Green College
Handsworth College
Matthew Boulton College
Sutton Coldfield College of Further Education
Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College
Cadbury Sixth Form College
Josiah Mason Sixth Form College
St. Philip's Sixth Form College (VA)

Bolton
Bolton Metropolitan College
North Bolton Sixth Form College
South Bolton Sixth Form College

Bradford
Bradford and Ilkley Community College
Keighley College
Shipley College

Buckinghamshire
Amersham College of Further Education, Art and Design
Aylesbury College
Milton Keynes College

Bury
Bury Metropolitan College
Holy Cross Sixth Form College (VA)

Calderdale
Calderdale College

Cambridgeshire
Cambridge Regional College
Isle College, Wisbech
Huntingdonshire College
Peterborough Regional College
Cambridgeshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture
The Sixth Form College (Hills Road)
The Sixth Form College (Long Road)

Cheshire
South Cheshire College of Further Education
North Cheshire College of Further Education
West Cheshire College of Further Education
Mid Cheshire College of Further Education
Macclesfield College of Further Education
Halton College of Further Education
Cheshire College of Agriculture
Priestley College (Sixth form)
Widnes Sixth Form College
Sir John Deanes Sixth Form College (VC)

Cleveland
Cleveland College of Art and Design
Cleveland Technical College
Hartlepool College of Further Education
Kirby College of Further Education
Longlands College of Further Education
Stockton-Billingham Technical College
Guisborough Agricultural Centre
Hartlepool Sixth Form College
South Park Sixth Form College
Marton Sixth Form College
Acklam Sixth Form College
Stockton Sixth Form College
Bede Sixth Form College
Prior Pursglove College (VC sixth form)
Sir William Turners Sixth Form College (VC)
St. Mary's Sixth Form College, Middlesbrough (VA)

Cornwall
Cornwall College
Mid Cornwall College
Penwith Tertiary College
Truro Tertiary College (due to open September 1992)
St. Austell Sixth Form College

Coventry
Hereward College of Further Education
Tile Hill College of Further Education
Coventry Technical College
Henley College of Further Education

Cumbria
Barrow-in-Furness College of Further Education
Carlisle College
Cumbria College of Agriculture and Forestry
Cumbria College of Art and Design
Kendal College of Further Education
West Cumbria College
Barrow-in-Furness Sixth Form College

Derbyshire
Chesterfield College of Technology and Arts
Derbyshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Derby Tertiary College-Mackworth
Derby Tertiary College-Wilmorton
High Peak College
North East Derbyshire College
South East Derbyshire Tertiary College

Devon
North Devon College
Plymouth College of Further Education
Exeter College
Bicton College of Agriculture
South Devon College of Arts and Technology
Plymouth College of Art and Design
East Devon College of Further Education

Doncaster
Doncaster College

Dorset
Weymouth College
Bournemouth and Poole College of Further Education
Kingston Maurward, the Dorset College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design

Dudley
Halsowen College
Dudley College of Technology
Stourbridge College of Technology and Art
King Edward VI College (VA Sixth Form)

Durham
Durham College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Darlington College of Technology
Derwentside College
Peterlee College
Bishop Auckland Technical College
New College Durham
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College

East Sussex
Eastbourne College of Arts and Technology
Lewes Tertiary College
Brighton College of Technology
Plumpton College
Hastings College of Arts and Technology
Varndean Sixth Form College
The Sixth Form College (Brighton, Hove and Sussex)
Bexhill College (sixth form)
Eastbourne Sixth Form College

Essex
Basildon College of Further Education
Braintree College of Further Education
Chelmsford College of Further Education
Colchester Institute
Epping Forest College
Harlow College
South East Essex College of technology
Thurrock Technical College
Writtle Agricultural College
Colchester Sixth Form College
South East Essex Sixth Form
Palmers Sixth Form College (VC)

Gateshead
Gateshead College

Gloucestershire
Stroud College of Further Education
Gloucestershire College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology
Royal Forest of Dean College

Hampshire
Fareham Tertiary College
Eastleigh College of Further Education
Cricklade College, Andover
Brockenhurst College
Basingstoke Technical College
Alton College
Sparsholt College, Hampshire
South Downs College of Further Education
Southampton Technical College
Farnborough College of Technology
Portsmouth College of Art, Design and Further Education
Highbury College of Technology
Totton College (sixth form)
Queen Mary's College (sixth form)
Barton Peveril College (sixth form)
Havant College (sixth form)
Farnborough Sixth Form College
Itchen College (sixth form)
Gosport Sixth Form College
Portsmouth Sixth Form College
Taunton College (sixth form)

Hereford and Worcester
Evesham College of Further Education
Worcestershire College of Agriculture
Pershore College of Horticulture
Worcester College of Technology
North East Worcestershire College
Kidderminster College of Further Education
Herefordshire College of Technology
Herefordshire College of Agriculture
Herefordshire College of Art and Design
Hereford Sixth Form College
The Sixth Form College (Worcester)

Hertfordshire
North Herts College
Hertford Regional College
West Herts College
Oaklands College

Humberside
Beverley College of Further Education
Bishop Burton College of Agriculture
East Yorkshire College of Further Education
Grimsby College of Technology
Hull College of Further Education
North Lindsey College of Technology
Wilberforce Sixth Form College
Wyke Sixth Form College
Franklin Sixth Form College
John Leggott College (sixth form)

Isle of Wight
Isle of Wight College of Arts and Technology

Kent
West Kent College
Canterbury College
Hadlow College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Kent College for the Careers Service
Thanet Technical College
North West Kent College of Technology
South Kent College
Mid Kent College of Higher and Further Education

Kirklees
Dewsbury College
Huddersfield Technical College
Greenhead College (sixth form)
Huddersfield New College (sixth form)

Knowsley
Knowsley Tertiary College

Lancashire
Lancashire College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Lancaster and Morecombe College
Blackpool and Fylde College
Preston College
Runshaw Tertiary College
Skelmersdale College
Blackburn College
Burnley College
Nelson and Colne College
Accrington and Rossendale College
Blackpool Sixth Form College
Newman College (VA sixth form)
St. Mary's Sixth Form College (VA)

Leeds
Airedale and Wharfedale College
City of Leeds College of Music
Jacob Kramer College
Joseph Priestley College
Kitson College
Leeds College of Building
Northern School of Contemporary Dance
Park Lane College
Thomas Danby College
Notre Dame Roman Catholic Sixth Form College (VA)

Leicestershire
Brooksby Agricultural College
Charles Keane College of Further Education
Coalville Technical College
Hinckley College of Further Education
Loughborough College
Melton Mowbray College of Further Education
South Fields College of Further Education
Wigston College of Further Education
Gateway Sixth Form College
Queen Elizabeth I College
Wyggeston Collegiate School (sixth form)
Rutland Sixth Form College

Lincolnshire
Lincolnshire College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Boston College
Grantham College
North Lincolnshire College
Stamford College
Lincolnshire College of Art and Design

Liverpool
City of Liverpool Community College

Manchester
Manchester College of Arts and Technology
South Manchester College
Shena Simon College (sixth form)
Loreto Sixth Form College (VA)
Xaverian College (VA sixth form)

Newcastle upon Tyne
Newcastle College

Norfolk
Norfolk College of Arts and Technology
Norfolk College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Great Yarmouth College of Further Education
Norfolk Institute of Art and Design
Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education
East Norfolk Sixth Form College
Paston Sixth Form College (VC)

Northamptonshire
Moulton College
Northampton College
Wellingborough College
Daventry Tertiary College
Tresham College
Northamptonshire College of Agriculture

North Tyneside
North Tyneside College of Further Education
Tynemouth College (sixth form)

Northumberland
Northumberland College of Agriculture
Northumberland College of Arts and Technology

North Yorkshire
Askham Bryan College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Bedale Agricultural Centre
Craven College
Harrogate College of Arts and Technology
Easingwold Agricultural Centre
Harrogate Agricultural Centre
Pickering Agricultural Centre
Scarborough Technical College
Selby College
York College of Arts and Technology
Scarborough Sixth Form College
York Sixth Form College

Nottinghamshire
Arnold and Carlton College of Further Education
Basford Hall College of Further Education
Broxtowe College of Further Education
Clarendon College of Further Education
Newark and Sherwood College of Further Education
North Nottinghamshire College of Further Education
Peoples College of Further Education
South Nottinghamshire College of Further Education
West Nottinghamshire College of Further Education
Brackenhurst College
High Pavement Sixth Form College
Bilborough Sixth Form College
Forest Fields Sixth Form College

Oldham
Oldham College
North Chadderton Sixth Form College
(due to open September 1992)

Oxfordshire
Oxford College of Further Education
North Oxfordshire Technical College and School of Art
Abingdon College
Henley College
Rycotewood College
West Oxfordshire Technical College

Rochdale
Hopwood Hall College

Rotherham
Rother Valley College of Further Education
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
Rockingham College of Further Education
Thomas Rotherham College (VC sixth form)

St. Helens
St. Helens College
Carmel Sixth Form College (VA)

Salford
Salford College of Further Education
Pendleton College (sixth form)
Eccles College (sixth form)
De La Salle College (VA sixth form)

Sandwell
Sandwell College of Further and Higher Education
West Park College (sixth form)
Rowley Regis College (sixth form)

Sefton
Hugh Baird College of Technology
Southport College
King George V College (sixth form)

Sheffield
Castle College
Parkwood College
Parson Cross College
Loxley College
Stradbroke College
Norton College

Shropshire
Telford College of Arts and Technology
Shrewsbury College of Arts and Technology
Walford College of Agriculture
Oswestry College
Shrewsbury Sixth Form College
New College (sixth form)
Ludlow College (VA sixth form)

Solihull
Solihull College of Technology
Solihull Sixth Form College

Somerset
Strode College
Bridgwater College
Somerset College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Somerset College of Arts and Technology
Frome College (Further Education)
Yeovil College
Richard Huish College (VC sixth form)

South Tyneside
South Tyneside College

Staffordshire
Tamworth College
Stafford College
Burton upon Trent Technical College
Cannock Chase Technical College
Newcastle under Lyme College
Staffordshire College of Agriculture
Leek College of Further Education and School of Art
Stoke on Trent Cauldon College
Stoke on Trent Technical College
The Sixth Form College (Stoke on Trent)

Stockport
Stockport College of Technology
North Area Sixth Form College
The Ridge Sixth Form College
Aquinas Roman Catholic Sixth Form College (VA)

Suffolk
Suffolk College of Higher and Further Education
Lowestoft College
Otley College of Agriculture and Horticulture
West Suffolk College

Sunderland
Monkwearmouth College
Wearside College

Surrey
Brooklands Technical College
Epsom School of Art and Design
Guildford College of Technology
Merrist Wood College of Agriculture and Horticulture
East Surrey College
North East Surrey College of Technology
Godalming College (sixth form)
Reigate College (sixth form)
Esher College (sixth form)
Woking College (sixth form)
Spelthorne College (sixth form)
Strode's College (VC sixth form)
Farnham College (VC sixth form)

Tameside
Tameside College of Technology
Hyde Sixth Form College
Ashton under Lyne Sixth Form College

Trafford
North Trafford College of Further Education
South Trafford College of Further Education

Wakefield
Wakefield District College
New College (sixth form)

Walsall
Walsall College of Art
Walsall College of Technology

Warwickshire
East Warwickshire College of Further Education
Mid Warwickshire College of Further Education
North Warwickshire College of Techology and Art
South Warwickshire College of Further Education
Warwickshire College of Agriculture
King Edward VI College (VA sixth form)

West Sussex
West Sussex College of Agriculture and Horticulture
Chichester College of Technology
Crawley College of Technology
Northbrook College, Design and Technology
Worthing Sixth Form College
Haywards Heath Sixth Form College
Collyers Sixth Form College (VA)

Wigan
Metropolitan College Wigan (temporary name from 1 April 1992)
Winstanley College (sixth form)
St. John Rigby Roman Catholic Sixth Form College (VA)

Wiltshire
Lackham College
New College
Salisbury College of Art and Design
Chippenham Technical College
Salisbury College of Technology
Swindon College
Trowbridge College

Wirral
Wirral Metropolitan College
Birkenhead Sixth Form College

Wolverhampton
Bilston Community College
Wulfrun College of Further Education

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his plans for capital grant expenditure for grant-maintained schools for the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: The planned level of capital expenditure on grant-maintained schools in 1992-93 is £28·5 million.

Each grant-maintained school approved to begin by September 1992 is eligible to receive a formula based allocation to be used for small capital works and items of capital equipment. The formula will be £10,000 per school plus £20 per pupil. Schools becoming grant-maintained in September 1992 will be able to claim $\frac{7}{12}$ of the full year allocation.

We have agreed allocations for named capital projects with a total value of £15·2 million to begin in 1992-93. Some projects are phased over two years. Of the 102 eligible schools 50 have received an allocation for a named capital project. Schools approved to become grant-maintained as from January and April 1992 have been invited to submit bids for capital projects by 27 January. There will be a further announcement for allocations to those schools in due course.

Within the total, there are allocations totalling some £8 million (including £5 million to be spent in 1992-93) for projects at 18 schools which form part of the technology schools initiative which was launched on 4 December. These allocations will enable schools to enhance their provision for technology-related subjects and take forward the teaching of technology in the national curriculum. Four of these schools have been selected as particularly well placed to develop an innovative and committed approach to technology education and be awarded GM technology school status: Bournemouth school, Ecclesbourne school, Great Barr school and St. George's school, Sleaford.

The proposed allocation of £500,000 to St. George's school, Sleaford for a technology block is complemented by a sponsored donation of £250,000 from Mr. Reg Brealey, the school's chairman of governors, through a charitable trust set up for the benefit of the school.

Grant-maintained schools continue to show their energy and commitment. I am sure that these capital allocations will help the schools to realise their full potential. I particularly welcome the allocations for projects within the technology schools initiative which I launched on 4 December.

I shall look to the four schools named as leaders in the field of technology teaching. They will develop close and practical links with business and industry.

The sponsor investment from Mr. Brealey is very generous and an example that I hope others will follow. St. George's school in Sleaford has been interested for some time in becoming a technology school and this project will enable it to become a leader and developer of good practice.

The following is a list of the named capital allocations.

Named Project Capital allocations for grant-maintained schools in 1992-93

All figures are in £000s

School	*Project*	*Total project allocation*
Technology Schools Initiative		
Beaconsfield High School	New Technology block and refurbishment	750
Bournemouth School	Rationalisation of Science and Technology facilities	546
Bullers Wood School for Girls, Chislehurst	Technology block	375
Caistor Grammar School	Technology, Science and IT building	287
Dartford Grammar School	Technology and Science facilities	260
Ecclesbourne School, Duffield, Derby	Technology facilities	780
Great Barr School, Birmingham	Technology facilities	700
Kingswood School, Corby	Food Technology, Graphics and Technology Rooms	330
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	Information Technology Centre	124
Nonsuch High School for Girls, Cheam, Surrey	Design and Technology extension and remodelling	700
Northwood School	Technology block and conversion	400
Reading School	Science and Technology facilities	630
Rickmansworth School	Remodel and repair craft block	250
St. George's School, Sleaford	Technology Block	[1]500
Watford Grammar School for Boys	Conversions to Design and Technology Centre	180
Watford Grammar School for Girls	Design and Technology facilities	400
Westcliff High School for Boys	Technology block	280
Wolverhampton Girls High School	Phase I—Craft, Design and Technology	450
	Total for Technology	7,942
Other Allocations		
Avon Valley School, Rugby	Roof repair	17
Baverstock School, Birmingham	Phase I—Building shell and Services	470
Beechen Cliff School, Avon	Sanitary, drainage, asbestos etc	160
Bingley Grammar School	Science Wing Extension	250
Bourne Abbey Primary	Classrooms and Medical facilities	160
Chalvedon School, Basildon	Re-cladding Middle School block	250
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	Esaential structural repairs	145
Collingwood School, Camberley, Surrey	Fabric repairs	50
Crossley Heath School, Halifax	Fire precaution work	210
Francis Bacon School St. Albans	Renewal of boilers and associated work	30
Graveney School, Wandsworth	Toilet refurbishment	100
Guildford County School	New Classroom Block	370
Hardley School, Southampton	Heating system repairs	130
Heckmondwike Grammar School	Repairs—old block	200
Highams Park School, Waltham Forest	Re-roof Technology workshops	29
Kingsley Park Middle School, Northampton	Asbestos, fire escapes and Technology	50
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	Upgrading of Toilets and Cloakroom	50
London Nautical School, Southwark	Upgrade Science Laboratory	150
Long Field High School, Melton Mowbray	Re-roofing phase II	100
Manor High School, West Midlands	Upgrade site to Health and Safety requirements	60
Oldfield School, Bath	Urgent fabric and structure work	50
Pate's Grammar School, Cheltenham	Phase II of re-build	1,997
Queen Elizabeth's School for Boys, Barnet	Replace windows	50
Queensbury School, Dunstable	Fire safety provisions	40
Queensmead School, Hillingdon	Roofing	52
Ribston Hall High School, Gloucester	Boilers and controls for heating	68
St. Bartholomew's School, Newbury, Berks	Health and Safety	155
Stroud High School	Science Block	780
Thamesview School, Gravesend	Health and Safety	100
Vyners School, Hillingdon	Science and Technology Block	638
Wilmington Boys Grammar School, Kent	Boiler house renewal	145
Wilmington Girls Grammar School, Kent	New Science Laboratory	170
Total other projects		7,226

[1] Provisional allocation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drugs (Prison Searches)

2. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison searches in the last 12 months resulted in drugs finds; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: During the year ending 31 December 1991 all methods of searching resulted in 683 drug equipment finds and 2,654 drug finds in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

Carl Bridgewater

8. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the police report into the prosecutions for the murder of Carl Bridgewater.

15. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Merseyside police to complete their inquiry into the Carl Bridgewater case.

21. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the Merseyside police to complete their inquiry into the Carl Bridgewater case.

Mr. John Patten: The Merseyside police are conducting a thorough investigation into the representations made about the case. Every effort will be made to complete the review as quickly as possible but I cannot say at this stage when the review will be completed.

Children's Rights Convention

13. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of whether the Asylum Bill meets the requirements of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Asylum Bill is consistent with the provisions relating to refugees at article 22 of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child.

Prison Service (Industrial Relations)

16. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Prison Officers Association to discuss industrial relations in the Prison Service.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend last met the Prison Officers Association on 16 September 1991. I met its representatives on 7 November.

Asylum

17. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants for asylum status have replied to the offer of an initial interview in response to postal applications.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 1 November 1991 all persons applying for asylum from within the United Kingdom who have been unable to produce a passport have been requested to attend a short interview for identification purposes. During November and December, 2,350 persons were invited for interview and 471—20 per cent.—attended.

Bail Offenders

18. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce his conclusions following the review of the recent studies of offending on bail.

Mr. John Patten: We are examining carefully the evidence from the review, and considering, in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers and others, what further action might reduce offending by people released on bail. We will announce our conclusions as soon as we can.

Vehicle Security

19. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to ban the sale of car skeleton keys to the general public.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to ban or control the sale of skeleton car keys.

Many people, such as locksmiths and garage owners, have a legitimate need for such keys. These devices are, however, often no more effective in gaining entry to locked vehicles than other more rudimentary tools, such as screwdrivers or shaped pieces of metal, and often require some skill on the part of the user to work effectively.

Inquiries made by the Home Office crime prevention centre and the Association of Chief Police Officers have found that there is no evidence of widespread misuse of skeleton car keys. In particular, the Association of Chief Police Officers has reported that these devices have not been found in the possession of offenders charged with either theft of or from a vehicle. We therefore see no need at present to consider legislating to control the possession, sale or advertising of skeleton keys. We shall, however, continue to monitor closely the sale and use of these devices. It should be noted that it is already a criminal offence, under section 25 of the Theft Act 1968, to carry skeleton keys for use in connection with any burglary or theft, and an offender is liable to imprisonment for up to three years.

Derek Bentley

20. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of his review of the conviction of Derek Bentley.

Mr. John Patten: I have now received a report from the police which is receiving urgent considerations. I hope soon to be in a position to decide whether any action on my part is appropriate in this case.

Prisons

22. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons he has visited in the period since he became Home Secretary.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have visited 24 prison service establishments in England and Wales, and four prisons overseas.

Crime Prevention

23. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are his plans to update crime prevention schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government issued updated guidance on setting up local crime prevention partnership schemes to the police, local authorities and others in 1990. Schemes such as neighbourhood watch and crime prevention panels have now reached record levels. In addition the safer cities programme was increased to 20 projects at the end of last year, and Crime Concern is involved in local crime reduction schemes in 11 areas. Under the drugs prevention initiative 20 local drugs prevention teams are being established to work closely with local communities in finding effective ways of preventing the spread of drugs misuse.

Criminal Activity

24. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the time lags involved before a drop in criminal activity by people in different age groups can be detected.

Mr. John Patten: The best available measure of criminal activity, by age group, is the number of persons cautioned by the police or found guilty by the courts. This information is published annually for each calendar year —figures for 1990 were published in Home Office statistical bulletin 31/91 on 16 December 1991.

Prison Building

25. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new prison places he expects will be available over the next 12 months as a result of his Department's prison building programme.

Mrs. Rumbold: In 1992 nearly 5,000 new prison places are expected to come into use, 3,840 at new prisons and a further 1,014 at existing prison establishments.

Police Cells

26. **Mr. Carr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are being held on remand in police stations in Lancashire.

Mrs. Rumbold: Today, there were 91 prisoners held in police cells in the Lancashire police area.

Firemen

27. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firemen there are in England and Wales; what proportion of these are retained firemen; and what are the wage costs involved in each sector.

Mr. John Patten: On 1 January 1991 there were 49,729 firefighters employed by local authorities in England and Wales, of whom 14,630—29·4 per cent. of the total, were retained firefighters. Estimated salary and wage costs for the financial year 1990-91 were £607·5 million for wholetime and £52·9 million for retained firefighters.

Humberside Police

28. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present establishment of the Humberside police force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The authorised establishment of the Humberside police is 2,025, an increase of 86 officers since the Government first took office. My right hon. Friend announced on 28 November 1991 his approval for the establishment to be increased by a further nine police posts from 1 April 1992.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what basis decisions to order detention of those declaring themselves asylum seekers at ports of entry are made;

(2) if he will provide a breakdown of the country of origin of those declaring themselves asylum seekers at ports of entry who were ordered to be detained in each of the years 1980 to 1990;

(3) how many of those who declared themselves asylum seekers at ports of entry were ordered to be detained in each of the years since 1980, and what proportion of those seeking asylum at ports of entry this figure represented in each of those years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Asylum seekers are detained only when the immigration service is not satisfied that they will comply with the terms of temporary admission. The other information requested by the hon. Member is not available centrally.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 13 December, *Official Report*, column *585*, which organisations submitted representations supporting the Government's planned changes to the law governing asylum; and whether he will list the names of these organisations.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Amnesty International, the Bar Council, Charter '87, the Council on Tribunals, Justice and UNHCR expressed support for one or more of the Government's proposed changes to asylum procedures, while expressing concerns about others.

Murder Statistics

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the Great Britain totals for each year since 1975 of *(a)* murders reported to the police, *(b)* convictions for murder and *(c)* convictions for murder which have been set aside in England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: The total number of homicides reported to the police in England and Wales for each year since 1975 is included in table 4·1 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1989" a copy of which is in the Library. Figures for the number of homicide offences where there was a conviction for murder are shown in table 4·7(b) of the same publication; these figures take account of successful appeals against conviction.

The number of prisoners serving life sentences for murder in prison establishments in England and Wales whose appeal was upheld, who were given a free pardon or whose life sentence was remitted is shown for the period 1976 to 1990, by year of termination of the life sentence.

Year of termination	*Successful appeal*	*Free pardon/ remission*
1976	2	0
1977	4	0
1978	8	0

Year of termination	Successful appeal	Free pardon/ remission
1979	4	1
1980	5	0
1981	3	0
1982	4	1
1983	0	1
1984	5	1
1985	7	2
1986	8	1
1987	5	0
1988	4	0
1989	12	2
1990	7	0

The information in the table is not readily available for 1975 and data for 1991 are not yet complete.

Immigration

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for inclusion in the immigration service's *(a)* INDECS computer, *(b)* intelligence and investigation unit computer based at Harmondsworth and *(c)* HOLMES system.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The immigration and nationality department electronic computer system (INDECS) contains details of the immigration status of individuals given conditional leave to enter the United Kingdom on a non-permanent basis.

Information accepted for inclusion in the immigration service intelligence and investigation unit computer is that considered to be of long-term immigration interest.

The HOLMES system is no longer in operation.

Prisoners (Medical Checks)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what medical checks are followed and by whom on prisoners released from prison on the grounds of ill health before the completion of their sentence; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: A decision to release a prisoner early on health grounds will be based inter alia on medical advice from the clinically responsible prison medical officer, usually following consultation with an appropriate specialist or specialists. The nature of the medical examinations carried out in such cases is a matter for the clinicians involved. It is also the medical officer's responsibility to make suitable arrangements with outside health agencies for post-release care.

Ports Records

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the purpose of the port suspect books; what sources of information are used to compile the books; and which authorities have access to the information;

(2) what is the purpose of the Home Office suspects index; what sources of information are used to maintain the index; which authorities have access to the information; and how many people are listed on the index.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The suspect index alerts the immigration officer to take action in respect of an individual who might not be identified in the course of routine examination. Information is received from a number of official sources. The index is used by the immigration authorities in the common travel area. Currently there are some 10,000 entries.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the capacity of the computer on which the Home Office suspects index is kept; and if it is linked to any other immigration service or police computers;

(2) which categories of information held in the port suspect books are computerised.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office suspect index is not computerised and the information contained in it is not received in computerised form.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the ports administration system has rendered redundant any other computer systems or manual information registers previously used at Heathrow, Gatwick and Dover east.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The prototype computer system at Dover eastern docks will become redundant when the port administration system is installed there. The new system will also replace certain manual registers at Heathrow, Gatwick and Dover which record details of people who have been required to submit to further examination, or refused leave to enter, or detained under Immigration Act powers, or in respect of whom a liability has been notified under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the capacity of the computer for the ports administration system; what sources of information are used; and what divisions of the immigration department and which other authorities have access to the system.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The port administration system comprises seven computers, each with disk storage capacity of 1,008 megabytes. It records information about passengers who are the subject of further examination, drawn mainly from interviews, and from documents in their possession. Access to the system is limited to members of the immigration service at the port where each computer is installed. In addition access to all the systems for maintenance purposes is available to a support team of immigration service officers at terminal 3, Heathrow airport, staff of the Home Office computer bureau at Bootle and authorised employees of the hardware contractors.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the ports administration system will be capable of fulfilling the information technology requirements of the 1990 European convention on asylum (the Dublin convention) and the 1991 draft convention on the crossing of external borders of the states of the European Communities.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Criminal Intelligence

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details of his plans to computerise fully those regional criminal intelligence

offices not earmarked for closure; what is the estimated cost of this programme; and if there will be a direct interface between regional offices and the proposed national criminal intelligence service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The five regional criminal intelligence offices not earmarked for closure will become part of the national criminal intelligence service which is to be established on 1 April 1992. Headquarters and regional offices will have direct access to the computer system being developed for the service. Until the specification for the system has been agreed, it is not possible to say what the cost is likely to be.

Police National Computer

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the sub-categories, and the size, of each index on the new police national computer.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The databases on the new police national computer are as follows:

	Entries
Vehicles (including stolen reports)	40,270,232
Persons	5,614,247
Convictions	4,036,366
Fingerprints	4,333,495
Stolen property	39,399
Police directories	3,542
The persons database includes:	
Disqualified drivers	273,760
Wanted/Missing persons	141,484

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the purpose of, and what information is held on, the police directories index of the new police national computer.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The index is a computerised version of the police manual which gives the name, address, postcode and telephone number of the force/station code used in PNC records. The index contains similar information for courts and also the codes for PNC terminals. The latter enables forces to send messages to PNC terminals in other forces.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department where the information stored on the extremist crime index of PNC1 is now held.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is being retained on PNC1 for the time being.

European Police Co-operation

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress was made at the Maastricht EC summit in the area of EC police co-operation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The treaty agreed at the European Council at Maastricht provides for a framework for intergovernmental co-operation on justice and home affairs which includes police co-operation in the prevention and combating of terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international crime. The European Council also ensorsed proposals for the setting up of a European Police Office (Europol) for the development and exchange of intelligence concerning serious crime.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what will be the initial functions of the proposed Europol; and if Europol will embrace members of *(a)* the European Community, *(b)* TREVI and *(c)* the so-called "friends of TREVI".

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Work on the establishment of Europol is being carried out under the auspices of TREVI, which provides a forum for co-operation on policing matters between member states of the European Community. Thus Europol will embrace all member states of the European Community, though there are at present no plans to go beyond this. It has been agreed that, as a first step, a Europol drugs unit will be set up to facilitate the co-ordination of information and intelligence on drugs misuse and trafficking in member states.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress was made in the field of European police co-operation at the last meeting of the TREVI group.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The meeting of TREVI Ministers held in The Hague on 3 December, attended on my behalf by my right hon. Friend the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), endorsed measures to strengthen practical police co-operation. These include: the establishment of national contact points for public order matters; guidelines having the aim of strengthening mutual assistance in criminal cases; recommendations on the controlled delivery of drugs; and police co-operation in common frontier zones.

The Ministers agreed to submit a report to the European Council, prepared by the ad hoc working group chaired by the United Kingdom, recommending the establishment of a central European criminal investigation office—Europol—with a drugs unit as its first stage.

Ministers also agreed, at the United Kingdom's suggestion, that car crime should be placed on TREVI's agenda and that the United Kingdom, at the invitation of the Portuguese presidency, should convene an informal seminar of experts on this subject during the first half of 1992.

Data Protection

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the Data Protection Registrar's work has dealt with the transfer of data internationally.

Mrs. Rumbold: I understand that several of the registrar's functions include work related to international transfers of data, but the amount this represents could be determined only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he is considering expanding the resources available to the Data Protection Registrar in response to the development of computer systems to exchange police and immigration data between states of the European Community.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is not possible at this stage to assess the resource implications of any system that might in future be established.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the annual staff and administrative expenditure on the offices of the Data Protection Registrar from its inception to date.

Mrs. Rumbold: The total expenditure of the office of the Data Protection Registrar, and the expenditure on salaries and wages, are set out in his annual reports to Parliament. In summary, they are as follows:

	Total expenditure	*Of which salaries and wages*
	£	£
1984-85	262,164	8,578
1985-86	1,612,906	273,865
1986-87	2,371,313	615,991
1987-88	2,604,099	680,866
1988-89	2,584,879	825,932
1989-90	2,888,134	947,777
1990-91	3,101,323	1,166,112

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many serving officers of the Metropolitan police force of the rank of inspector or above were reduced in rank as a result of disciplinary hearings in each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These are matters for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Ports Administration System

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the purpose of the port administration system; and if the system is to be extended to ports of entry other than Heathrow, Gatwick and Dover east.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The purpose of the port administration system is to carry out many existing caseworking functions with greater accuracy and speed, to produce standard forms and to record and collate management and satistical information. A decision will be taken about extending the system to other ports after a post-implementation review of the existing system has been completed later this year.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the ports administration system has the capacity to interface with functionally similar computers in other European Community states.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the ports administration system has indexes of people claiming asylum or people who have tried to gain illegal entry to either *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* other EC member states.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The system holds for each port at which it has been installed an index of people, including asylum claimants, who have been required to submit to further examination under the Immigration Act or in respect of whom a liability has been notified under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act 1987. No index is held of people who have tried to gain entry to other EC member states.

Firearms

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require the use of computerised systems for the registration and licensing of gun shops and firearm dealers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have no plans to do so. Under the Firearms Act 1968 firearms dealers (whether owners of gun shops or not) must be registered with the chief officer of police in whose area their business is located. Under the Firearms Rules 1989 the register held by the police may be kept manually or on computer.

Assaults on Police

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions he has reached as a result of the Home Office survey of sentences awarded to persons convicted of assaulting police officers.

Mr. John Patten: We will announce our conclusions as soon as we have received and analysed all the returns from the six-month survey which covered the period to 31 December 1991.

Opium Derivatives

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail the steps taken by his Department to implement the recommendations contained in paragraph 9.66 of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on opium derivatives, Cm. 630, published in 1988.

Mr. John Patten: The attention of the European Commission and our EC partners has been drawn to the need to develop a common policy with regard to the licit trade in controlled drugs and in particular trade in opium derivatives, as recommended by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The matter has been raised at meetings of the European Committee Against Drugs (CELAD) and is currently being taken forward by the Commission in discussion with member states.

Operation Container

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the percentage increase of prisoners held in Operation Container in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of prisoners held in Operation Container increased by 11 per cent. over the 12-month period to 22 January.

During the past year, in order to reduce the number of prisoners held in Operation Container, prison service management brought back into use 340 places in Manchester prison. The role of Everthorpe was changed from young offender institution to adult training prison and additional young offender places have been made available in Stoke Heath young offender institution and remand centre. In addition the roles of two young offender establishments in the midlands have been changed to adult use in order to increase the number of adult training places available generally for the allocation of sentenced adult prisoners. Every effort is being made by the prison service fully to utilise available accommodation in the north-west.

Mr. Sohail Yousaf

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the naturalisation application of Mr. Sohail Yousaf of 59 Maryland road, Stratford, London E15, was referred to the Metropolitan police for the purposes of arranging an interview; and when he expects the interview to take place.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mr. Yousaf's application was first referred to the Metropolitan police on 6 March 1990. The papers were returned to the Home Office in April 1990 when Mr. Yousaf requested an endorsement to be placed in his passport. After completion of this action his papers were referred back to the police on 17 May 1991. I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that a date has not yet been fixed for Mr. Yousaf's interview but an interview should be arranged within the next three months.

Police Statistics

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the increase in the authorised establishment of police officers in each year since 1987 for *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* north Yorkshire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table and is provided on the basis of financial years:

Year	*England and Wales*	*North Yorkshire*
1987-88	859	nil
1988-89	965	nil
1989-90	1,156	15
1990-91	1,030	25
1991-92	711	6
1992-93	807	4

Mr. Akhtar Zaman

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when instructions were sent to the post in Islamabad to issue an entry clearance visa to Mr. Akhtar Zaman (Ref: 81956) enabling him to join his wife in the United Kingdom; when they were received in Islamabad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A copy of the adjudicator's determination was sent to the entry clearance officer in Islamabad on 20 December 1991 and arrived on 8 January 1992. A visa was issued on 20 January.

ESDA Testing

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on evidence that officers have been instructed to place a plastic card under the page on which hand-written statements of evidence are being recorded to frustrate any subsequent ESDA testing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that plastic cards were introduced for officers conducting surveillance operations for two main purposes; to stiffen the soft-cover notebooks used and to provide officers with procedural guidance which is printed on the card. Each note book and each page of every notebook is uniquely numbered and this ensures the integrity of the record.

Plastic cards are not used between the sheets of manual records of interviews with suspects.

Travellers

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to review the law affecting gipsies.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I take it that my hon. Friend is referring to the use of section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 which deals with aggravated trespass. We have only recently conducted a thorough public review of section 39. The Home Secretary announced his conclusions on 22 May 1991. He decided that no change to the law was required at present.

SCOTLAND

Housing Finance

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the housing revenue account capital allocation for *(a)* Edinburgh and *(b)* Scotland for each of the past 10 years; and if he will give the percentage in each year based on capital receipts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The gross HRA capital allocations and the percentage based on capital receipts, issued to Edinburgh and to Scottish local authorities in aggregate in each year since 1982-83 are set out in the table. The figures incorporate any supplementary allocations made during the year and are expressed in cash terms.

Year	*Edinburgh*		*Scotland*	
	Gross allocation	*Per cent. based on capital receipts*	*Gross allocation*	*Per cent. based on capital receipts*
	£ million		*£ million*	
1982-83	15·200	24·4	248·126	30·6
1983-84	12·132	53·7	259·973	35·1
1984-85	12·000	84·3	227·518	52·9
1985-86	18·026	90·4	288·923	42·6
1986-87	22·092	38·5	324·445	36·1
1987-88	30·034	33·3	415·191	37·0
1988-89	34·167	72·2	452·864	54·5
1989-90	33·818	83·8	491·311	67·0
1990-91	34·651	78·0	473·796	57·9
1991-92	33·262	54·6	461·775	52·8

Royal Navy Reserve

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the occasions when port divers from the Royal Navy Reserve have rendered assistance to police forces, coast guards or harbour authorities in Scotland in the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the effect of the closure of Royal Navy Reserve port diving branch on such civil authorities.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Assistance from RN divers is sought occasionally but there are no separate records showing when this was provided by RN Reserve port divers. I do not anticipate that the closure of the RN Reserve port diving branch will have any significant effect on such authorities.

Dental Anaesthesia

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will now publish his response to the Poswillo report on safety in dental anaesthesia.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Poswillo report was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Health's standing dental advisory committee and his response to the clinical recommendations of the report was published on 18 October 1991. The Secretary of State for Scotland concurred with his views and a similar paper was issued in Scotland on the same day. Funds of £1·2 million are being made available to health boards in 1992-93 to commence the implementation of the report's recommendations.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each year since 1965, the number of children under the age of 16 years who have died in Scotland while undergoing, or shortly after undergoing, general anaesthesia for dental treatment in *(a)* dentists' surgeries and *(b)* hospitals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 December 1991]:* It is not possible to provide these numbers in the form requested. Death certificates from which the information has been taken do not always record that a death occurred under anaesthetic or shortly after it, nor, if death did occur under these circumstances, why or where the anaesthetic was administered. The figures include all deaths to children under the age of 16 years in Scotland where the death certificate did indicate that the death occurred during or following general anaesthesia and that the anaesthetic was administered during dental treatment.

Year	*Number of deaths*
1965	0
1966	1
1967	0
1968	0
1969	1
1970	0
1971	1
1972	0
1973	0
1974	1
1975	1
1976	0
1977	0
1978	0
1979	0
1980	0
1981	1
1982	0
1983	0
1984	0
1985	0
1986	0
1987[1]	1
1988	0
1989	0
1990	1

[1] The death in 1987 is one which is known to have occurred under the conditions requested but which could not be identified through the death certificate.

On Monday, 20 January I opened a new dental and oral surgery, orthodontus and endoscopy unit at Falkirk and Royal district hospital. The new unit will provide a high quality general anaesthetic service for community dentistry.

Shettleston Health Centre

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost of the recent re-decoration of Shettleston health centre; how many rolls of wallpaper and square yards of carpeting were used; and what were the costs per roll and per square yard.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member has written to the general manager of Greater Glasgow health board who is responsible for these matters.

Health Boards Circular

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate when the proposed circular on inter-agency co-operation dealing with resource transfer from health boards to local authorities will be published; and if he will make a statement as to its scope.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Government's proposals for resource transfer were issued for consultation on 13 January 1992. As well as continuing with shared financing we propose to introduce arrangements to enable boards to transfer resources to local authorities where it is proposed to transfer the responsibility for obtaining care for individuals or groups of people. These arrangements would include cash transfers where boards considered these appropriate. The "dowry" scheme, introduced in England in the 1980s, is an example of such a transfer.

Limestone Pavement

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many areas of limestone pavement have been notified for protection in Scotland; how many have had orders made; and when limestone pavement protection will be complete in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The presence of limestone pavement is one of several features which in each case have led to the notification of seven separate sites of special scientific interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. No orders have been made for any of these sites but it is open to the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland or the Countryside Commission for Scotland to seek such further protection should the need arise.

Fish Farms

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that the level of fees charged by river authorities in Scotland to fish farms are related to the size of enterprises and quantity of water used.

Mr. Lang: Charges under the river purification boards' charging schemes are related to the cost to the boards of monitoring specific discharges. The amount of monitoring reflects the protection necessary for the water environment in each case. Charges for fish farms vary according to a range of factors which are not always related to size. These include the degree of dilution available at each location and the sensitivity to pollution of the waters concerned. The board's schemes have been approved following extensive consultation with interested parties and we have no plans to seek changes at this time.

Doctors

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many serving doctors are members of health boards; and how many of those are from the Indian subcontinent.

Mr. Lang: There are eight serving doctors among the non-executive members of health boards; and 13 doctors, mainly directors of public health, among the executive members. Records of ethnic origin of health board members are not held centrally at present.

Fire Regulations

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make it his policy not to amend the building standards for Scotland to include a trade-off between fire resistance periods and the installation of sprinklers until there is evidence to show that fire safety will not be jeopardised;

(2) if he will make it his policy not to alter the building regulations for Scotland in respect of fire resistance periods and structural non-combustibility to conform with the England and Wales building regulations until his experts have had the opportunity to assess the impact in practice of those regulations.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Building Standards (Scotland) Regulations are regularly reviewed to take account of changing circumstances and legislation consequent upon European Community directives. Any proposed amendments are first considered by the Building Standards Advisory Committee before going out for consultation with relevant interested bodies. No amendments will be made therefore until there has been the opportunity for all shades of opinion to be taken fully into account.

Forestry Commission Land

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the land that was sold by the Forestry Commission in 1991 in each county or region, giving the name of the property, the amount of land sold, the name of the purchaser and the amount of money the land was sold for; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission is preparing a list of the areas of forest land which it sold in 1991. I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library as soon as possible.

Details of sales of land other than forest land are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

ESAs

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce the areas he is considering to designate as environmentally sensitive areas; with whom he is consulting about this initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has sought advice from the statutory conservation agencies in Scotland on the areas suitable for designation as environmentally sensitive areas. Consideration is currently being given, in consultation with the conservation agencies, to proposals for a number of areas and an announcement will be made in due course.

Islay (Geese)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he took to ensure that the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland would meet all interested parties to reach a conclusion with regard to goose management on Islay before the beginning of the autumn season in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 13 January 1992]:* It is for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland (NCCS) to decide the nature and timing of the consultations which will take this matter forward. The chairman of NCCS, Magnus Magnusson KBE, met the Islay Goose management committee in February 1991. Officials of NCCS have maintained a dialogue with the management committee subsequently. They have also taken part in a series of joint meetings with the Scottish Office Environment Department and the Scottish Office Agriculture and Fisheries Department seeking to develop proposals for future goose management arrangements. Given the complexities of the matter it has not been possible to provide a new system of financial support for farmers for the present season but proposals for future years are to be put to the local area of the National Farmers Union of Scotland in February. To cover the period from autumn 1991 when geese have been on the island, the arrangements for scaring to protect crops and grassland were extended in October 1991 for a further year.

Coal Industry

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons were employed in the coal industry in Scotland in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1984, *(c)* 1989 and *(d)* 1991, respectively.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The number of persons employed in coal extraction and manufacture of solid fuels in Scotland was 17,150 in 1984 and 3,420 in 1989. These data are taken from the census of employment: the data from the 1991 census are not yet available, and no census was conducted in 1979.

British Steel

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the dates of the meetings between himself or any other Scottish Office Minister and the management of British Steel during the last six months.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* My hon. Friend and I met the chairman of British Steel on 6 January.

HEALTH

Dental Anaesthesia

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will now publish his response to the Poswillo report on safety in dental anaesthesia.

Mr. Dorrell: My noble friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, announced on 18 October 1991 that most of the clinical recommendations made by the expert working party under the chairmanship of Professor Poswillo have been accepted. Additional funds will be made available from April this year to ensure that where general anaesthesia is necessary during dental treatment the highest standards are met.

Bio Products Laboratory

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will include the Bio Products Laboratory in the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what account is taken by the Bio Products Laboratory in establishing its prices for plasma-related products of (i) the return on sales of red blood cells products and (ii) the total cost of producing plasma-related products;

(3) if he will make it his policy to publish the accounts of the Bio Products Laboratory separately from those of the Central Blood Laboratories Authority;

(4) if he will list the surpluses or losses made by the Bio Products Laboratory in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Bio Products Laboratory is an integral part of the Central Blood Laboratories Authority. As with commercial enterprises, its internal management accounts are not intended for publication. The Central Blood Laboratories Authority publishes an annual report covering its activities as a whole. In the past five years, the Central Blood Laboratories Authority has stayed within the cash limit set by the Department.

The Bio Products Laboratory produces only plasma-derived products, not cellular products. In establishing its prices, the Bio Products Laboratory takes account of its operating costs, which include reimbursement of the cost of plasma collection by the regional transfusion centres.

There are no plans at present to include the Bio Products Laboratory in the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the products which were affected by the transitional arrangements on licensing when the Bio Products Laboratory lost its Crown immunity status on 1 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested in respect of the Bio Products Laboratory is confidential by virtue of the restrictions on disclosure contained in section 118 of the Medicines Act 1968.

Mental Illness

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential places and places for day care for the mentally ill there were in *(a)* 1979-80 and *(b)* 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on residential and day centre places provided by local authority social services departments at 31 March 1980 and the latest available date is given in the table. Detailed figures for the period 1980 to 1990 were published in the statistical bulletin "Personal Social Services: Provision for people with mental illness in England 1980-90", a copy of which is in the Library. Information is not available centrally on the numbers of day care places provided by mental illness hospitals.

Number of places in residential homes and day centres for people with mental illness

As at 31 March	*Number of places in residential homes*	*Number of places in day centres*[1]
1980	5,866	7,424
1990	11,706	12,807
1991	n/a	15,113

[1] Including places made available to local authorities by voluntary or private organisations and estimates of places for mentally ill people in day centres for mixed client groups.

Genetic Research

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what ethical guidelines have been published by his Department for research scientists engaged in genetic research.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has issued guidance to local research ethics committees to which all proposals for research on human subjects in the national health service must be submitted for approval. Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

On 16 January 1992 the Government published the report of the Committee on the Ethics of Gene Therapy. The Government are consulting widely on the conclusions and recommendations of the committee and will decide what steps to take once the consultation process is completed.

Diagnostic Equipment

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set a guideline as to the number of magnetic resonance imagers that is needed to serve the diagnostic health needs of the British people.

Mr. Dorrell: Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is only one of a number of diagnostic imaging techniques which include conventional radiography, nuclear medicine, ultrasound and computerised tomography. It is therefore not possible to give any generally valid guidance on the number of magnetic resonance imaging imagers needed either for England and Wales as a whole or for individual regions. Provider units in each region will need

to assess their need for additional imagers in the light of diagnostic facilities already available and their own and purchasing authorities' judgment of clinical priorities.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to prevent the private health insurance schemes placing restrictions on payment for in-patient psychiatric care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for the companies concerned to decide the cost and scope of cover offered. The national health service continues to provide comprehensive care to all, regardless of means.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about the performance of the London ambulance service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a number of representations. The London Ambulance Service Board is currently introducing measures to improve performance, including

—Spending £1·5 million on new technology to improve response times.
—Introducing 60 new frontline accident and emergency and patient transport vehicles at a cost of £3·8 million.
—The recent introduction of motor cycles manned by paramedics to overcome traffic congestion problems.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what were the total numbers of patients removed from waiting lists for reasons other than admission in the six months ended September 1991;

(2) what were the numbers of patients admitted from the waiting lists in the six months ended September 1991.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Provisional figures for September 1991, which are based on 90 per cent. of expected returns, show that admissions from waiting lists increased from 1,384,900 to 1,390,300 (0·4 per cent.) in the six months since March 1991.

Removals from waiting lists for reasons other than admission fell from 168,918 to 165,200 (2 per cent.) in the same period.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals were used in the survey of patients' attitudes for the information given in his press release of 14 January on NHS trusts; and what was the sample size of the survey.

Mr. Dorrell: The survey was carried out amongst 901 patients at the following trust hospitals:

Newcastle Mental Health NHS trust
Hillingdon Hospital NHS trust
Southend Healthcare NHS trust
The Guy's and Lewisham NHS trust
The West Dorset General Hospitals NHS trust
Taunton and Somerset NHS trust
Walsall Hospitals NHS trust
Manchester Central Hospitals and Community Care NHS trust

Dementia

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly patients suffering from dementia have been taken in the past year from hospitals in London to private nursing homes in the North and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, thus transferring the costs of caring for them from hospitals to the Department of Social Security; what consultation his Department has had with the Royal College of Psychiatrists about the effects of this for the patients concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The data held centrally do not record the geographical location of patients on discharge.

It has been made clear to health authorities in health circular HC(89)5 that patients should not be discharged until proper arrangements have been made for any continuing care which may be necessary.

In addition, circular HC(90)23/LASSL(90)11 provides that no mentally ill patient should be discharged without an agreed care programme which ensures that their needs for continuing health and social care and for accommodation are assessed and that appropriate arrangements are made. Care programmes must include the nomination of a key worker to keep in close touch with the patient and monitor the provision of the agreed package of health and social care. If appropriate care in the community cannot be arranged, then the patient must be offered in-patient care. Copies of both circulars are available in the Library.

Officials of the Department have regular contact with the Royal College of Psychiatrists' section of old age psychiatry. In November last year the Department supported a one-day conference on long-term care held by the royal college.

Child Health

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government are taking to reduce inequalities in child health.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The Government's approach to variations in the health of children and other groups was set in paragraphs 4.15 and 4.16 of the "The Health of the Nation" (Cm. 1523), a copy of which is in the Library. In particular, the Government have, as there explained, sought to tackle specific issues which can be targeted for effective action. Examples in the field of child health include guidance on children's needs for hospital services (already issued) and for community services (in preparation), improvements to record levels in the rates of immunisation to reduce death and disability from preventable diseases, increased participation by GPs in child health surveillance and increased emphasis on investigating the causes of perinatal deaths.

In making such changes the Government will continue to make the best use possible of the improved systems now available for the delivery of health care, including the contractual arrangements with GPs and between purchasers and providers, and the new responsibilities of health authorities for assessing the health and health care needs of their local population and for the better integration of family, community and hospital services.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future role of *(a)* general practitioners, *(b)* health visitors, *(c)* nurses

and *(d)* clinical medical officers and senior clinical medical officers in the development of child health services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* In addition to general health services such as immunisation programmes, a key aspect of the development of child health services is the provision of child health surveillance. An important change, since the introduction in April 1990 of the new GP contract, has been the increase, to over 50 per cent., in the number of GPs now undertaking primary child health surveillance of children under five. As a consequence we are, with NHS management and the professions, taking steps to ensure that the respective duties of doctors, health visitors and nurses in the community child health services are reviewed and updated. Health authorities are being issued with a core programme for child health surveillance prepared by the professions. A joint working party, with the conference of (medical) royal colleges and the British Medical Association, is also considering the integration of medical staff careers in the hospital and community child health services.

DEFENCE

Plutonium

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any contracts with the Atomic Energy Authority for research into the fabrication of weapons' components using plutonium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are no such contracts.

Building 220, Harwell

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the recent refurbishment of building 220 at Harwell is related to any contract which has been placed with the Atomic Energy Authority.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

"Secrets of the Sands"

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his Departmental Library a copy of the transcript and videocassette of the BBC 2 nature programme "Secrets of the Sands" on the United Kingdom nuclear test site at Maralinga in Australia, broadcast on 28 October.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department has a copy of this programme.

Rescue Helicopters

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received for an increase in the number of rescue helicopters based at RAF Chivenor.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since 1 October 1989, when search and rescue cover at RAF Chivenor was reduced to daylight hours only, my Department has received one such representation.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the rescue helicopters at RAF Chivenor were *(a)* called out and *(b)* called to locations in Somerset in each of the last four years for which figures are available.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information is given in the table:

Year	*Number of Callouts*	*Number of Callouts to locations in Somerset*
1988	188	4
1989	189	7
1990	157	5
1991	149	13

Marine Markers

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about his Department's recent removal of the seaward marker of the western limit of the measured mile at Spithead, from Browndown, Gosport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Three representations have been received from commercial shipbuilders in the area.

Spithead Marker

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will take any necessary action to restore a seaward marker for the western limit of the measured mile at Spithead, to replace the marker recently removed by the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Royal Navy no longer has a requirement for the measured mile at Spithead and one of the western markers was removed to make way for the erection of an aerial farm on the same site. There are no plans to replace the marker. Other measured mile facilities are available around the coast.

Nuclear Reactors (Decommissioning)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what will be the expected cost to his Department of the eventual decommissioning of the Calder Hall and Chapelcross reactors;

(2) if he will make a statement about the expected lifespan of the Calder Hall and Chapelcross magnox reactors.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The expected lifespan of the reactors at Calder hall and Chapelcross is a matter for British Nuclear Fuels Limited and the nuclear installations inspectorate. British Nuclear Fuels Limited has responsibility for assessing the costs of decommissioning these reactors. MOD's share of the costs will be influenced by a number of factors that cannot be accurately determined at this time.

Hafnium

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's use of the element hafnium.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Hafnium is a constituent of alloys used in engines for both civil and military aircraft as well as certain other classified applications.

Nuclear Weapons Safety Review

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the current procedure for reporting the recommendations of the nuclear weapons safety review;

(2) what have been the 10 most recent recommendations of the nuclear weapons safety review; on what dates they were recommended; and what action has been taken to implement them.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 20 January at column 20.

Civilian Employees

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the current total of his Department's civilian employees and the percentage based in Scotland, together with cost of employment for the relevant figures.

Mr. Alan Clark: On 1 October 1991, my Department employed a total of 140,697 United Kingdom-based civilians and a further 27,588 locally engaged civilians overseas. The estimated total cost of employment of civilian staff in 1991-92 is £2,849 million. Approximately 8·6 per cent. of the United Kingdom-based civilians are employed in Scotland. The estimated cost of civilian employment in Scotland is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Kirkcudbright Range

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiry has been carried out into alleged irregularities at the Kirkcudbright range; what was the outcome of the inquiry; what action he has taken as a result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A number of allegations were made in August last year by TGWU representative concerning misuse of official property and labour at the Kirkcudbright range, which is part of the military division of the Defence Research Agency. The allegations were investigated by the Ministry of Defence police who concluded that there were no grounds for proceeding with criminal charges against the individuals concerned. It was evident, however, that there were a number of management deficiencies that should be rectified. This is now in hand. The managing director of the division has taken the necessary managerial action to ensure that such deficiencies will not recur.

Forces Benevolent Funds

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will request the service benevolent funds to report to him on the use they have made of funds donated to the Gulf trust that were passed to them; and if he will place copies of the reports in the Library;

(2) how much money donated to the Gulf trust by the public was allocated by him to each of the service benevolent funds.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The service benevolent funds are meeting claims arising from the Gulf conflict by payments made to them from the Gulf trust fund; so far, over £600,000 has been distributed. Final allocations to the service benevolent funds of moneys donated to the Gulf trust will take place when the Gulf trust is formally wound up; this is planned for February 1993. It is not the practice for the service benevolent funds to release details of how they have dealt with individual cases.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to lessen the difference in levels of payment from Government Departments and the forces benevolent funds received by members of the forces who sustain similar injuries whilst serving in *(a)* the Falklands war, *(b)* the Gulf war and *(c)* in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Particular account was taken of the experience of operating the South Atlantic fund when establishing the Gulf trust. The main aim was to provide for the long-term relief of the physical and mental distress and financial needs of those who suffered as a result of the Gulf conflict, and we are satisfied that the Gulf trust, working through the service benevolent funds, provides the best and most effective way of meeting that aim.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conditions were laid down by him for the use of Gulf trust money by the service benevolent funds; and if the money can be paid to anyone other than members of the forces who participated in the Gulf war or their families.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The deed of trust for the Gulf trust prescribes that moneys must be used to meet the financial needs of the beneficiaries and for the relief of sickness, distress or any other physical or mental disability, arising from the involvement of the Armed Forces in military and other operations relating to or in connection with the Gulf conflict. Potential beneficiaries are limited to members of the Armed Forces involved in the Gulf conflict; civilian personnel attached to or accompanying the Armed Forces in the Gulf conflict; and their respective dependants.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints he has received from members of the forces who served in the Gulf, their families or their representatives, regarding the distribution of money given by the public to the Gulf trust; and what was the nature of the complaints.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A small number of representations has been made to the Department about the use of Gulf trust money. It would be inappropriate to comment on individual cases.

Faslane Submarine Base

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many methods are available of achieving the same effect as that being worked on in the abandoned magnetic treatment facility project, Faslane; and what estimate has been made of the cost of adapting these alternatives to the enhanced specifications currently derived for submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Following the decision not to proceed with the magnetic treatment facility, work is currently under way to examine alternative means of achieving the effective magnetic treatment of submarines. Firm cost estimates have not yet been made but we expect costs to be significantly less than for the original project.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *387*, on the magnetic treatment facility project, when it was abandoned; and what percentage of the original budget for the magnetic treatment facility, Faslane, the sum spent represented.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The decision not to proceed with the magnetic treatment facility project was reached in June 1991. Expenditure at the time of cancellation represented 23 per cent. of the original cost estimate.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate was made of the cost effectiveness and likely completion of the magnetic treatment facility project, Faslane, before giving it his approval.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: As with all Ministry of Defence equipment projects, the cost effectiveness of the proposed magnetic treatment facility project was subject to careful examination in the light of all the available evidence before it was approved. The project was judged to represent good value for money at the original cost estimate to meet the operational requirement for the rapid and efficient magnetic treatment of submarines. The project was to be completed in the mid-1990s.

MV Polar Circle

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long is the lease taken out on the MV Polar Circle; if it remains his policy to retain a naval vessel in Falklands waters beyond April 1992; and if he will consider renaming MV Polar Circle, HMS Endurance for the duration of its lease.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Pursuant to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea on 8 November at column *295*, the Government are to purchase HMS Polar Circle as the permanent replacement of HMS Endurance as the Antarctic ice patrol ship. Polar Circle will return to home waters in May on completion of this season's patrol. She will remain Polar Circle for the rest of her current deployment. Her permanent name can now be considered, and it is intended that the Admiralty Board will reach a decision by the time she returns to the United Kingdom.

Woolwich Garrison

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be able to answer the letter sent to him by the chair of the public protection committee of Greenwich council regarding radioactive contamination discovered at the Woolwich garrison.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department replied earlier this week.

Defence Export Services Organisation

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what happened to the Kuwait office of the Defence Export Services Organisation during the Iraqi occupation of that country; and what is the current position.

Mr. Alan Clark: The First Secretary (Defence Supply) is the Defence Export Services Organisation representative in the British embassy in Kuwait. He was out of the country on leave when the Iraqi invasion took place and returned in April 1991.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the overseas offices of the Defence Export Services Organisation, together with the dates they were set up.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Defence Export Services Organisation has established overseas offices as follows:

	Year
Washington	1972
New Delhi	1984
Riyadh	1984
Kuala Lumpur	1986
Seoul	1988
Ankara	1988
Kuwait	1988
Canberra	1989
Jakarta	1991
Bangkok	1991

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the police post at Menwith Hill station in North Yorkshire was built and at what total cost; on which budget the expenditure was shown; and what agencies in the United Kingdom or overseas contributed to the costs of construction.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who owns the land on which Menwith Hill station is located; who has the power to evict and charge persons entering the station and surrounding land; and whether any part of the land is leased.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The land on which Menwith Hill station is located is owned by the Secretary of State for Defence, in right of the Crown. Those authorised by the Secretary of State, as the landowner, are entitled to remove trespassers from Menwith Hill station. Local farmers are licensed to make use of parts of the site under the Agricultural Holding Acts.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons those who trespass at Menwith Hill station have been evicted for civil trespass rather than arrested under byelaw 2(b) of the Forest Moor and Menwith Hill byelaws; what plans he has to seek injunctions, similar to that served on Ms. Lindis Percy, to be served on others; and what plans he has for legislation to replace the byelaws.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Whilst we consider that the HMS Forest Moor and Menwith Hill station byelaws remain valid, it is at present Crown prosecution service policy not to prosecute under these byelaws. Improvements to the byelaws are currently under review. Further injunctions against other persistent trespassers are under consideration.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 January 1992

NORTHERN IRELAND

Rates

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how many Northern Ireland pensioners and others in receipt of benefits other than income support will pay more rates in 1991-92 as a percentage of disposable income than they paid in 1990-91.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Harbour Improvements

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on improvements to the harbours at Church Bay and at Ballycastle.

Mr. Needham: In the current financial year Moyle district council, with the aid of grant from the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, has undertaken improvements to the harbours at Church bay, Rathlin and Ballycastle. These works include dredging at Church bay and repairs to Boyd's wall, Ballycastle. In addition hydraulic model testing, which will assist the design work on proposed major improvements at Ballycastle, will shortly be completed.

The Department had hoped to be able to provide substantial grant support to the council over the financial years 1992-93 and 1993-94 for major improvement works to both harbours. In the event it has not proved possible to allocate the necessary resources for this purpose. However the council and the Department are now considering, as an interim measure, the provision of slipways at both harbours which would enable a small roll-on/roll-off vessel to operate the ferry service between the two harbours.

Child Benefit

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the cost of the provision of child benefit in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hanley: The total expenditure on child benefit was as follows:

	£ million
1986-87	177·3
1987-88	182·8
1988-89	178·2
1989-90	180·2
1990-91	182·4

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what problems have been reported regarding use of ecstasy and similar drugs in the Province; and what action is being taken to meet those problems.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 17 January 1992]:* I am informed by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary that misuse of ecstasy, LSD and amphetamine is increasing in Northern Ireland. These drugs continue to be associated with young people and places of entertainment, particularly "rave parties". The RUC is working closely with other police forces in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, and with Her Majesty's Customs, to counter this trend in drugs misuse.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Universities (Research Funding)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money allocated by the Universities Funding Council in 1990-91 to each university and university college can be identified as being for research; and of this allocation how much was utilised for purposes other than research by each institution.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Universities Funding Council allocated £680 million on research-based criteria to universities in academic year 1991-92. This sum was not hypothecated for research. The council has allowed each institution to determine its own spending on teaching and research within the aggregate funds available to it from all sources.

A-Levels

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students were entered for advanced-level examinations in mathematics, physics and chemistry in England and Wales, for each year from 1979 to the present, giving the information *(a)* as the number of entrants and *(b)* as a percentage of the total number of entrants for all subjects in that year.

Mr. Eggar: For the academic years 1978-79 to 1989-90 —the latest year for which information is available—the numbers of school leavers attempting advanced level examinations in mathematics, physics and chemistry in English schools, were as are shown in the table. The table also shows these numbers as a percentage of all school leavers attempting any subject at the advanced level.

The figures for Wales are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

School leavers—England
Numbers of pupils attempting advanced level examinations

	Mathematics		Physics		Chemistry	
	Pupils attempting (000's)	*As percentage of all pupils attempting A levels*	*Pupils attempting (000's)*	*As percentage of all pupils attempting A levels*	*Pupils attempting (000's)*	*As percentage of all pupils attempting A levels*
1978-79	44·99	35·1	35·20	27·5	32·46	25·3
1979-80	48·08	36·5	35·84	27·2	31·74	24·1
1980-81	50·06	36·9	38·15	28·1	34·22	25·2
1981-82	54·89	37·9	41·62	28·7	36·79	25·4
1982-83	56·12	37·8	40·72	27·4	36·30	24·4
1983-84	56·60	38·8	41·12	28·2	36·48	25·0
1984-85	56·06	39·9	38·95	27·7	35·60	25·3
1985-86	56·69	40·8	36·81	27·4	35·00	26·1
1986-87	52·8	39·2	34·13	25·4	31·95	23·7
1987-88	53·85	40·3	33·44	25·0	32·17	24·1
1988-89	51·48	37·1	32·93	23·8	30·65	22·1
1989-90	50·68	33·9	32·96	22·1	33·29	22·3

Primary Classes

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will estimate the current cost of reducing all primary class sizes to 30 or less; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The average size of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in January 1991 was 26·3. If local education authorities and schools were to organise their provision differently, pupils in primary schools could be taught in class sizes of 30 or less with the existing number of teachers in primary schools.

Primary School Teachers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out his estimates of the number of primary school teachers he expects to be employed in each school year until 1996-97.

Mr. Fallon: A total of 176,300 full-time equivalent teachers were employed in primary schools in January 1991, the latest year for which we have information. The number of teachers which will be employed in each year up to 1996-97 will depend on the decisions taken by local education authorities and schools with delegated budgets on the deployment of the funds at their disposal.

Youth Service, Warwickshire

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with Warwickshire county council about its decision to completely close its youth service from 1 April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: None. I understand that a proposal is to be considered by the education committee of Warwickshire county council on 28 January to end the directly provided youth and community service, and to make such provision in future through voluntary groups, schools and colleges.

The youth service is statutorily part of further education. Section 41 of the 1944 Education Act, which is inserted under section 120 of the Education Reform Act, places a duty on loal education authorities to secure the provision of adequate facilities for further education. Section 53 of the 1944 Act places a duty on local education authorities to secure that the facilities for primary, secondary and further education provided for their area include adequate facilities for recreation and social and physical training. It is for each local education authority to discharge these statutory obligations in accordance with local needs, circumstances and priorities.

School Leavers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a table showing for Greater London the numbers of young people who left school at each of ages 16, 17, and 18 years in each year since 1988, the numbers expected to leave school in 1992, and the number of people at each of these ages in each of those years.

Mr. Fallon: The following table gives the breakdown of the pupils leaving school in Greater London, analysed by age for the years 1987-88 to 1989-90—the latest year for which information is available. The table also shows the projected population figures for Greater London for the same years.

School examinations survey Greater London
A. School leavers

	Thousands		
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
School leavers			
Aged 16	43·89	38·67	36·42
Aged 17	14·44	12·12	11·48
Aged 18 and over	17·35	17·42	18·53
Total leavers	75·68	68·21	66·43

B. Estimated population aged (at previous 31 August): January

	Thousands		
Aged at previous August	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
15	80·80	75·60	71·10
16	87·90	82·10	77·00
17	99·20	91·90	86·00

Music

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the teaching of music in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend issued last August proposals for music and art in the national curriculum, representations on which were sent to the National Curriculum Council.

In the light of the National Curriculum Council's advice, he intends on Monday to publish for consultation, draft orders with associated documents setting out attainment targets and programmes of study for art and music in the national curriculum for pupils aged five to 14, as he is required to do by section 20(5) of the Education Reform Act. Copies will be placed in the Library.

The period for consultation on the draft orders will end on 4 March 1992. My right hon. Friend intends to make the final orders in March 1992 in good time for schools to begin teaching national curriculum art and music to pupils aged five, seven and 11 from the following autumn. The draft orders apply to England. My right hon. Friend will be publishing for consultation draft orders for art and music for Wales.

TRANSPORT

British Rail Escalators

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to keep records on the number of escalators operated by British Rail; and how many of them are broken at any one time and for how long.

Mr. Freeman: These are operational matters for British Rail.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what procedure he has set up to consult the London borough of Newham over the route of the channel tunnel rail route and the new international station to be built at Stratford.

Mr. Freeman: I intend very shortly to issue invitations to a consultative forum for local authorities affected by the proposed route corridor and stations for the channel tunnel rail link.

Railways (Research and Development)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how research and development for the railways will be funded after the privatisation of British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: This will depend on the future structure of British Rail, on which the Government have not yet taken decisions.

SS Richard Montgomery

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he is now able to make a statement on the recent survey on the SS Richard Montgomery.

Mr. McLoughlin: A very thorough survey of this dangerous wreck was completed in September. The Medway ports authority has since completed a fresh hydrographic survey of the surrounding area.

There is no evidence of any recent major changes to the wreck itself, although it continues to deteriorate and may be expected to begin to break up within a few years. No dangerous material was identified during the latest survey, although a substantial quantity of explosives must be presumed to remain on board. The surveys have shown that the silt around the site is mobile and extensive scouring under the wreck itself was observed. This can only accelerate its breaking up and the disappearance of what is now still visible above the water surface.

I have decided in the light of the survey findings that the site of the wreck should remain a prohibited area under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 and that no attempt be made to clear it or its cargo. The wreck will continue to be monitored and another survey will be undertaken in due course.

I have placed in the Library a paper summarising the results of these and previous surveys, and the steps taken over the years to quantify and contain the danger from explosives on this wreck.

I am sending a copy to my hon. Friend.

ENVIRONMENT

Genetic Engineering

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what research his Department is funding into whether genetically engineered micro-organisms decay in the environment or multiply in an uncontrollable fashion threatening ecological balance;

(2) what research his Department is funding into the possible hazards to the health of man and of animal and plant life from the release of genetically engineered micro-organisms into the environment.

Mr. Baldry: My Department spent over £1 million in 1990-91 on research into genetically modified organisms and expects to maintain future expenditure at a similar level. A substantial part of the research programme focuses on risks associated with the release of genetically modified micro-organisms, and more particularly on developing and assessing techniques for their isolation, identification and tracking in the environment. Results from this research are now being used to determine accurately whether populations of micro-organisms multiply or decay after release and to assess their subsequent impacts on other organisms in the environment.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's estimate of the contribution to the greenhouse effect from *(a)* the combustion of fossil fuels in Britain and *(b)* the escape of natural gas into the environment during the production and processing of North sea gas and its distribution to the consumer.

Mr. Baldry: Revised figures for annual United Kingdom emissions of greenhouse gases up to 1990 will be published in late February or early March in the 14th edition of the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics". The new estimates indicate that in 1990 United Kingdom emissions of CO_2 from fossil fuel combustion were about 2·6 per cent. of world emissions. Current estimates of world methane emissions from natural gas production are uncertain within a factor of at least two. United Kingdom emissions in 1990 can therefore be estimated only very approximately at between 1·7 per cent. and 3 per cent. of world emissions from this source.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures he has on the relative efficiency of absorption of infra-red radiation leading to the greenhouse effect for *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* nitrogen dioxide, *(c)* methane and *(d)* chlorofluorocarbons.

Mr. Baldry: The relative impact of greenhouse gases is only partly explained by their radiation absorption properties. Differences in concentration, atmospheric lifetime and secondary effects on the concentration of other gases are also important.

To take account of all these factors, the inter-governmental panel on climate change (IPCC) developed the concept of the global warming potential (GWP).

Initial tentative GWP values for a wide range of substances were published in the panel's first scientific assessment, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House.

The IPCC, in a supplementary report which will be made public within a few months, will give revised GWPs for the main greenhouse gases. However the summary of the assessment, published recently, indicates that there is now greater uncertainty in the calculation of GWPs.

United Nations Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the meeting between his Department and non-governmental organisations regarding progress towards the United Nations conference on environment and development, held on 15 January.

Mr. Baldry: The meeting on 15 January enabled representatives of non-governmental organisations to give a verbal report on the international meeting they attended in Paris in December. They undertook to provide the Department of the Environment with the final report of the meeting as soon as it was available.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 15 January, column *574*, on liaison with non-governmental organisations on the forthcoming United Nations conference on environment and development, he will set out *(a)* the dates of the meetings held to date, the issues discussed at each meeting and *(b)* the dates of the planned meetings and issues expected to be discussed.

Mr. Baldry: Ministers and officials of the Department of the Environment and other Departments liaise regularly and often with a wide range of non-governmental organisations, individually and in groups, on UNCED issues and will continue to do so in the course of the government's preparations for the conference in June.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *574-75*, how many copies of the booklet on the United Kingdom's overall approach to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development have been published; and where else the booklet has been made available for the wider public.

Mr. Baldry: Six thousand copies of the booklet were originally printed and a further 6,000 have been ordered. It has been made available to posts overseas and is being widely used in replies to Ministerial and official enquiries about UNCED.

"Eco Decision"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for his Department's library to subscribe to the new international journal, "Eco decision", published in Canada.

Mr. Baldry: The library will obtain a specimen copy to see if it is likely to be of use to the Department.

Audit Commission

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list all the management and occasional papers published by the Audit Commission, showing the dates they were commissioned and completed, and the cost of producing each paper;

(2) how many comparative and other studies were undertaken by the Audit Commission in each year since 1983, under section 26 of the Local Government Finance Act 1982; what the total cost of these studies was for each of the years, expressed in 1991 prices; and how long each study took to complete.

Mr. Key: The Audit Commission is responsible for deciding what papers it will publish and what studies it will promote or undertake. Any available information will be obtainable from the Audit Commission.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of the Audit Commission's operating costs for each year since 1983 is attributable to activities not related to auditing the performance of local authorities.

Mr. Key: This information is not available in the form requested. The Audit Commission's annual reports show that the percentage of the Audit Commission's total operating costs represented by central studies was as follows:

	Percentage
1983-84	5·0
1984-85	4·7
1985-86	5·1
1986-87	4·3
1987-88	4·2
1988-89	4·3
1989-90	3·9
[1]1990-91	3·6

[1] Excludes operating costs and costs of central studies relating to the NHS, for which the Audit Commission assumed responsibility on 1 October 1990.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will show *(a)* the total salaries and *(b)* the total staff costs of the Audit Commission for each year since 1983, expressed in 1991 prices.

Mr. Key: Total salaries and staff costs for field and support staff in the district audit service and the Audit Commission headquarters at 1991 prices[1] are listed. Payments to audit firms and contract audit staff are excluded.

Year	*Total salaries*	*Total staff costs*
	£000	*£000*
1983-84	9,859	13,279
1984-85	11,956	15,331
1985-86	12,500	16,341

Year	Total salaries £000	Total staff costs £000
1986-87	13,172	17,735
1987-88	13,924	18,871
1988-89	14,341	19,172
1989-90	16,082	21,757
[2]1990-91	20,697	27,945

[1] Calculated using GDP deflator index.
[2] Includes additional salaries and staff costs payable from 1 October 1990 in relation to NHS activities.

District Auditors

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, for each year since 1983, he will list all the public interest reports issued by district auditors, showing the names of the local authorities concerned, the dates they were issued and the political control of those authorities at the time the reports were issued.

Mr. Key: Auditors are required to send copies of public interest reports concerning local authorities to the Audit Commission and do not send copies to the Secretary of State for the Environment. Any available information will be obtainable from the Audit Commission.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what percentage the fees payable by local authorities for the services of district auditors were increased each year since 1979; and what was the annual rate of inflation applying at the time of each increase.

Mr. Key: Increases in audit fee rates charged to local authorities in England and Wales are not readily available for the years prior to 1984. In subsequent years provincial fee rates have increased as shown in the table. Provincial fee rates cover around 70 per cent. of authorities. Supplements are charged to authorities in London and the south-east to cover additional costs.

Year	Per cent. rise compared to previous year	GDP deflator index (per. cent. inflation)
1984-85	0·0	5·0
1985-86	7·1	5·5
1986-87	5·8	3·3
1987-88	6·5	5·4
1988-89	5·8	7·2
1989-90	8·1	6·5
1990-91	10·4	8·5
1991-92	6·5	7·0

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount paid by local authorities, in England and Wales, in fees to district auditors each year since 1979, expressed in *(a)* current prices and *(b)* 1991 prices.

Mr. Key: The gross fee income obtained from local authorities in England and Wales before 1983-84 is not readily available. The amounts of gross fee income obtained from the annual reports and accounts of the Audit Commission for 1983-84 onwards are as listed.

Year	Gross fee income (£000) Current prices	1991 prices[1]
1983-84	14,987	22,391
1984-85	20,002	28,459
1985-86	21,477	28,960
1986-87	23,663	30,892
1987-88	25,388	31,434
1988-89	27,936	32,272
1989-90	31,881	34,586
1990-91	37,958	37,958

[1] Calculated using GDP deflator index.

Hostels for the Homeless

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of occasions in the last year for which records are available when grants from his Department to hostels for the homeless run by charitable organisations have been paid late; and in how many cases over the same period interest and charges on bank overdrafts incurred by the charity as a result of late payment has been refunded.

Mr. Yeo: Most revenue funding of hostels for the homeless is made by the Housing Corporation, using hostel deficit grant (HDG) or special needs management allowance (SNMA).

Under the rough sleepers initiative, my Department is meeting some revenue costs of hostels and emergency shelters under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985: These payments are made as soon as my officials are satisfied with the financial and other information required from the voluntary organisation concerned. No payments of interest or charges on overdrafts have been made or requested.

Housing, Walsall

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive an answer to the letter written on 17 December to the Minister of State over housing in the borough of Walsall.

Mr. Yeo: I have written to the hon. Member today.

Local Authority Staff

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total number of staff employed directly by local authorities, in England and Wales, in each year since 1979.

Mr. Key: The information for England is as listed. Staffing levels of local authorities in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Year	Staffing levels at June of each year Total staff (full-time plus part-time)	Total (full-time equivalents)
1979	2,512,593	1,975,170
1980	2,474,900	1,951,070
1981	2,420,956	1,914,368
1982	2,392,851	1,887,175
1983	2,405,448	1,892,603
1984	2,409,561	1,891,823
1985	2,419,293	1,892,117

Year	Staffing levels at June of each year Total staff (full-time plus part-time)	Total (full-time equivalents)
1986	2,448,709	1,902,192
1987	2,490,518	1,922,430
1988	2,514,330	1,929,719
1989	2,453,922	1,886,548
1990	2,480,059	1,900,965
1991	2,457,751	1,885,941

Source: Joint Staffing Watch for England.

Note:—Three major events caused significant losses from the local authority sector during the period covered by this table. The numbers involved are:

1. Approximately 6,300 ftes due to the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils in 1986.
2. Around 14,500 ftes due to the change in status of the local authority bus and municipal airport staff in 1986 and 1987.
3. Around 39,000 ftes when polytechnics and higher education institutions transferred from the public to the personal sector in 1989.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what evidence his Department has that local authorities have abused the current rules with regard to compulsory competitive tendering; and if he will publish a list of those authorities involved.

Mr. Portillo: A full list of local authorities against whom statutory action has been taken under sections 13 and 14 of the Local Government Act 1988 and sections 19A and 19B of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 follows. There are many other instances where there is evidence of a breach of the statutory provisions but the Secretary of State has concluded that the case for statutory action is not made.

Notices issued under Section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 Where (a) the Authority appeared to have acted in an anti-competitive manner

Authority	Date of notice
Birmingham city council	10 May 1990
Braintree district council	29 March 1990
Bristol city council	4 September 1989
Bury metropolitan borough council	1 June 1990
Camden, London borough of	3 July 1990
Charnwood borough council	21 December 1989
Doncaster metropolitan borough council	21 September 1990
East Lindsey district council	9 April 1990
Eden district council	29 March 1990
Halton borough council	9 October 1991
Haringey, London borough of	12 November 1991
Hillingdon, London borough of	4 September 1989
Knowsley metropolitan borough council	7 December 1989
Leicester city council	11 September 1990
Liverpool city council	31 May 1990
Nottingham city council	8 January 1992
Redditch borough council	18 January 1991
Thurrock district council	3 October 1990
Wakefield metropolitan borough council	6 March 1991
Warrington district council	2 August 1991
Waveney district council	24 July 1991
Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council	3 January 1990
Woodspring district council	6 September 1990
York city council	10 May 1990

Notices issued under Section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 Where (b) the Authority appeared to have failed to achieve the prescribed financial objective

Authority	Date of notice
Breckland district council	19 September 1991
Camden, London borough of	3 July 1990
Crawley borough council	29 July 1991
Crawley borough council (2 notices)	9 October 1991
Eastleigh borough council	18 December 1990
Epsom and Ewell borough council	1 July 1991
Gloucester city council	28 October 1991
Gosport borough council	29 July 1991
Harrogate borough council	1 July 1991
Haringey, London borough of	12 December 1990
Humberside county council	8 June 1990
Lewes district council	28 October 1991
North Tyneside metropolitan borough council	1 July 1991
Preston borough council	22 November 1991
Redbridge, London borough of	1 July 1991
Shropshire county council	28 October 1991
Surrey county council	28 October 1991
Waverley district council	28 October 1991
West Devon district council	1 July 1991

Notices issued under Section 13 of the Local Government Act 1988 Where (c) the Authority appeared to have failed to comply with the detailed specification for the work

Authority	Date of notice
Camden, London borough of	3 July 1990

Directions served under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988 where

(a) the authority appeared to have acted in an anti-competitive manner

Doncaster MBC, 11 December 1990 (replacement direction issued 28 March 1991)
Hillingdon LB, 13 March 1990 (replacement direction issued 1 August 1990)
East Lindsey DC, 6 July 1990 (replacement direction issued 31 July 1990)
Knowsley MBC, 6 July 1990 (replacement direction issued 3 August 1990)
Leicester City C, 19 December 1990 (replacement direction issued 29 January 1991)
Liverpool City C, 6 August 1990 (replacement direction issued 24 June 1991)
Redditch BC, 5 March 1991
Thurrock DC, 19 December 1990 (replacement direction issued 5 March 1991)
Wakefield MBC, 15 August 1991
Woodspring DC, 8 November 1990
York City C, 9 August 1990 (replacement direction issued 13 September 1990).

(b) the authority appeared to have failed to achieve the prescribed financial objective

Camden LB, 31 October 1990
Eastleigh BC, 9 April 1991
Haringey LB, 20 June 1991
Harrogate BC, 15 November 1991
Humberside CC, 30 July 1990
and

(c) the authority appeared to have failed to comply with the detailed specification for the work

Camden LB, 31 October 1990.

Notices issued under section 19A of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 where

(a) the authority appeared to have acted in an anti-competitive manner

	Date
Wirral MBC	28 March 1989
Liverpool City	30 May 1991
Salford City C	1 July 1991

and

(b) where the authority appeared to have failed to achieve the prescribed financial objective

	Date
Barrow in Furness DC	1 July 1991
Brent LB	20 December 1989
Bromley LB	29 July 1991
Camden LB	1 July 1991
Copeland BC	9 July 1991
Eastleigh BC (2 directions)	18 December 1990
Greenwich LB	10 April 1991
Harrogate BC (2 directions)	1 July 1991
Kingston Upon Thames LB	29 July 1991
Milton Keynes BC	15 October 1991
Portsmouth City C	29 July 1991
Rochdale MBC	7 February 1991
Salford MBC	1 July 1991
Shepway DC	1 July 1991
Stroud DC	10 April 1991
Tonbridge and Malling BC	10 October 1990
Tower Hamlets LB	1 July 1991
Waltham Forest LB	29 July 1991
Warrington DC	29 July 1991
Worthing BC	29 July 1991
Wychavon DC	29 July 1991
Wycombe DC	12 December 1990

Directions served under section 19B of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980 where

(a) the authority appeared to have acted in an anti-competitive manner
Wirral MBC—23 October 1989
and

(b) where the authority appeared to have failed to achieve the prescribed financial objective
Brent LB—24 July 1990
Barrow-in-Furness DC—15 November 1991
Copeland BC—20 December 1991
Greenwich LB—25 September 1991
Harrogate BC (two directions)—15 November 1991
Rochdale MBC—20 December 1991
Shepway DC—15 November 1991
Tonbridge and Malling BC—28 February 1991
Tower Hamlets—15 November 1991

Drinking Water

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to meet the requirements of the EC drinking water directive in the light of the Advocate General's opinion on the case before the European Court.

Mr. Trippier: The significance of this opinion has been widely misrepresented. First, it does not have to be followed by the court, which will give its judgment at a later date.

Secondly, the standards in the EC drinking water directive are not necessarily those currently met in other member states, but those which all member states should meet. All member states are having difficulty in doing that, and the Commission has so far taken legal action for failing to meet the directive's requirements against 10 other member states besides the United Kingdom.

There are two respects in which this country is unique. We alone have a detailed, firmly committed and fully funded programme, costing £2 billion, for remedying almost all breaches of the directive by 1995. And we are the only member state to have a comprehensive and completely open system for monitoring drinking water quality and publishing the results at national level, in England and Wales, through the drinking water inspectorate's annual report.

The drinking water inspectorate has confirmed that the standard of our drinking water is in fact already very high. Of 3·3 million tests carried out in England and Wales during 1990, 99 per cent. showed compliance with the requirements of our national regulations, which are more stringent than those of the EC directive.

In this court case, the Commission made five allegations. One was about compliance with the standard for lead in certain parts of Scotland. The Advocate-General concluded that the United Kingdom is not in breach of the directive in this respect. However we accept that some supplies do exceed our more stringent national standard, and action is therefore being taken by the water undertakers to reduce the risk of that standard being breached.

Three of the five allegations had nothing to do with the quality of drinking water as such, but were solely concerned with whether United Kingdom legislation had been passed to enact all the provisions of the directive. The Advocate-General considers that the court must look at the position in 1989, when the preliminary procedures finished, rather than the actual position today. Legislation in Scotland came into effect in 1990, and legislation covering water used in food production in September 1991. The remaining point in dispute was legislation in Northern Ireland. This is at an advanced stage of preparation. The absence of legislation has not, however, delayed the action being taken by the Northern Ireland water service to achieve full compliance with the standards in the directive.

The remaining allegation was about nitrate levels in some parts of England. Breaches of the standard for nitrate are being eliminated as quickly as is practicable. Of the 29 supply zones originally named by the Commission, seven now comply. But in some other cases compliance cannot be achieved until 1995. If there were any evidence of a health hazard in these zones meanwhile, immediate action would be taken to make an alternative supply of water available to vulnerable groups.

The Commission's case did not contain any allegations about compliance with the directive's standards for substances other than lead and nitrate.

This is the first case brought against the United Kingdom on an environmental issue in the 20 years that we have been a member of the European Community. Few member states can match this record.

Birmingham (Heartlands)

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for the future of the Heartlands area of Birmingham.

Mr. Heseltine: Having considered the problems of the area carefully, and having received proposals from

Birmingham Heartlands Limited and the Birmingham city council, I am pleased to announce that I propose to establish a Birmingham Heartlands urban development corporation. The necessary statutory order will be laid before the House as soon as possible. I am also pleased to announce that Sir Reginald Eyre has agreed to become the chairman of the development corporation.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority area the proportions of local authority finance derived from revenue support grant, specific grant, non-domestic rate income and poll tax for 1991-92.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* I am arranging for the available information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his latest estimates for each local authority of *(a)* the percentage of total budgeted poll tax income collected so far in the current year, *(b)* the amounts outstanding in £ million and *(c)* the numbers of liability orders taken out for poll tax debt.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* I am arranging for the available information on community charge collection to be placed in the Library of the House. No information is available on the number of liability orders obtained by each local authority.

Battersea Power Station

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when officials from the Department last inspected the fabric of Battersea power station; and what steps are currently being taken by the Department to safeguard the building.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* English Heritage, my right hon. Friend's statutory advisers on historic buildings matters, who have extensive listed building powers in London, visit Battersea power station regularly to monitor its physical condition. They last visited the building in November 1991 and will be visiting again within the next couple of weeks. They are also in regular contact with the owner. There is no evidence to suggest that the building has deteriorated over the last two years and the most important internal features are being kept weathertight and waterproof.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many genetically modified organisms were released into the environment in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Under the Genetic Manipulation Regulations 1989, the Health and Safety Executive was notified of 12 proposals to release genetically modified organisms to the environment, in the year 1991.

Public consultation has just been completed on proposed new regulations to be made under part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. Under the proposed regulations releases of genetically modified organisms would be subject to consents by the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Health and Safety Executive.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Blasphemy

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Attorney-General if he will prosecute the authors and publishers of the free booklet, "Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction", published by the Islamic Progagation Centre, Small Heath, Birmingham, for blasphemy.

The Attorney-General: This booklet has not been referred by any complainant to the Crown Prosecution Service headquarters for consideration.

Legal Aid

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General how many investigations are currently being undertaken by the investigation branch of the Legal Aid Board; and what is the average length of time taken for those investigations to be completed.

The Attorney-General: Sixty-three cases are currently being investigated by the Legal Aid Board. It took an average of some two years to conclude each of the seven cases prosecuted in the past three years.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General what consultations have been held with the Association of Chief Police Officers concerning the number of fraud squad investigations into fraudulent claims for legal aid which are awaiting data processing by the Legal Aid Board.

The Attorney-General: There has been no direct consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers. However, the investigation manager of the Legal Aid Board liaises regularly with various police fraud squads throughout England and Wales to discuss possible fraudulent legal aid claims.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* successful and *(b)* total prosecutions there have been following evidence supplied to fraud squads by the investigations branch of the Legal Aid Board over the last three years; how much public money has been *(a)* lost and *(b)* subsequently recovered arising from such investigations; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: In the past three years there have been seven Crown Court prosecutions, five of which have been successful. The Legal Aid Board has been awarded some £52,000 formal compensation by the court for three of these cases. The board pursues the recovery of any sums overclaimed from the legal aid fund, whether or not there is evidence of fraud and irrespective of the outcome of any criminal proceedings.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General what effect the introduction of central taxing teams has had on the time taken to deal with legal aid claims; and if he will take steps to reduce this time.

The Attorney-General: Since the establishment of the central taxing teams in March 1991, only cases under £4,000 are determined in the Crown Court. In the year

until March 1991, the percentage of non-standard fee determinations paid within one month of the Crown Court was 62·5 per cent. for solicitors and 62·4 per cent. for counsel. In the eight months from March to November 1991, the percentage of non-standard fee determinations remaining in the Crown Court paid within one month had increased to 71 per cent. for solicitors and to 71·3 per cent. for counsel. The percentage of standard fee claims paid within 10 days had increased from 67·8 per cent. to 70·2 per cent. for solicitors and from 67·9 per cent. to 70·1 per cent. for counsel. The average time taken to deal with standard fee claims had been reduced from 12 days to 10·5 days for solicitors and from 11 days to 9·75 days for counsel. Equivalent figures are not available for claims amounting to more than £4,000 which are now handled by the central taxing teams, but the times taken by the teams to determine such claims in November 1991 were provided in a recent written answer to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlisle) *Official Report*, 11 December 1991, column *421*.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has recently increased the number of determining officers available to the teams by nearly 40 per cent. In addition, where a number of claims for less than £4,000 are linked to claims for between £4,000 and £8,000, circuit taxing directors have been authorised to release these claims to the court for determination and this is done wherever appropriate. These initiatives have resulted in a significant increase in the disposal rate of the teams which will lead to a reduction in waiting times in the coming months. A number of initiatives to train additional determining officers are also being carried forward.

Social Security Appeals

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Attorney-General what is his assessment of the delays experienced by applicants for benefit by the Office of the Social Security Commissioners in Edinburgh in dealing with appeals.

The Attorney-General: In 1990-91 the average waiting time from the date on which appeals became ready for determination by commissioners to the notification of the decisions to the claimants was 14 months. This was caused by a backlog of appeals in the office of the social security commissioners in Edinburgh. The situation has now improved considerably and the current average waiting time is seven months.

EMPLOYMENT

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each region and for Great Britain as a whole how many people were participating in *(a)* employment training, *(b)* the enterprise allowance scheme, and *(c)* youth training in each month since September 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: As the information requested is contained in a number of tables I will write to the hon. Member.

Disability

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what arrangements he proposes to introduce after re-organisation of services for people with disabilities to enable members of placing, assessment and counselling teams or disablement resettlement officers to make home visits to those people who because of transport difficulties or the severity of their disability are unable to attend a local employment service office;

(2) if disabled persons who are at an interview to establish whether they are eligible to register under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 can *(a)* be represented or escorted by a third person, *(b)* see what is being written about them on an employment registration document and *(c)* ask for the counsellor to be changed if they feel they are being treated unreasonably; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what information he has on the number of people registered under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 for each year since 1987; how many were registered under section 1 or section 2; how many were *(a)* male or *(b)* female; how many were aged under 25 or over 50 years of age; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Vocational Training

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will indicate the forecast amounts of European social fund money that will be received by British industry in respect of vocational training in 1992 and 1993; what is the forecast of United Kingdom public sector provision towards vocational training for each of these years supporting such European social fund funding; and what are the principal sources from which such public sector provision is forecast to be provided, together with the amounts of funds for each of these years.

Mr. Forth: The main objective of the European social fund (ESF) is to assist the unemployed into permanent employment by means of vocational training and other employment measures. To the extent that ESF contributes to a better trained work force, the fund is of benefit to the whole of British industry.

A wide variety of organisations secure direct ESF support, including training and enterprise councils, local enterprise companies in Scotland, and industry training organisations. The fund also provides major support in respect of such national programmes as employment training and youth training which are in turn delivered locally by TECs and LECs.

Under the current European Community rules, money from the ESF is used to fund 45 per cent. of the eligible costs of a project, with the remaining 55 per cent. to come from matching by public funding. The principal sources of this public expenditure are central Government and individual local authorities. In 1991-92 we anticipate receiving £499·5 million from the ESF for Great Britain, requiring public matching funding of at least £610·5 million. Details of anticipated receipts from the ESF for 1992-93 and 1994-95 will be published shortly in departmental expenditure plans.

Privatisations

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for the five years prior to privatisation the loss or profit of *(a)* the Skills Training

Agency and *(b)* Professional and Executive Recruitment; and if he will list any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Jackson: *(a)* The privatisation of the Skills Training Agency (STA) was completed in May 1990. From 1 April 1984 STA was required to operate trading accounts. These are contained and fully explained within the published MSC/TA White Paper accounts for the financial years 1984-5 to 1988-89 which have been laid before Parliament. For 1989-90 no separate trading accounts were produced for STA and its activity is covered in the Trading Agency White Paper accounts (1989-90) which were published in July 1991. The total surplus/deficit position for the five financial years 1984-85 to 1988-89 (after exceptional items and extraordinary costs) is as follows:

Years	*£ million*[1]
1984-85	(15·2)
1985-86	(17·5)
1986-87	0·2
1987-88	(2·9)
1988-89	(27·3)

[1] Figures in brackets reflect deficit amounts.

STA, as part of MSC and its successors was included in the Department's vote and was able to draw funds from that vote in meet its commitments. No loans were made to STA.

(b) The privatisation of Professional and Executive Recruitment (PER) was completed in September 1988. From April 1983 PER was required to operate a trading account. Full details are contained in the MSC White Paper accounts for the years 1983-84 to 1986-87. Accounts for 1987-88 are contained in House of Commons Papers Nos. 582 and 603 of 1987-88. The net surplus/deficit position for the five financial years 1983-84 to 1987-88 is as follows:

Years	*£ million*[1]
1983-84	0·1
1984-85	0·2
1985-86	0·1
1986-87	(0·2)
1987-88	(1·0)

[1] Figures in brackets reflect deficit amounts.

PER as part of MSC and the employment service was included in the Department's vote and was able to draw funds from that vote to meet its commitments. No loans were made to PER.

Radiological Emergency

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to incorporate European Community directive 89/618 Euratom on informing the general public about health protection measures to be applied and steps to be taken in the event of a radiological emergency into the United Kingdom law at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Forth: I can confirm that it is the Government's policy to incorporate the requirements of European Council Directive 89/6182 Euratom into Great Britain law; and I would refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer given in reply to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 13 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *457*, for the timetable for implementation.

TECs

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide figures of training and enterprise councils' budgets for each of the regions in Great Britain for the last two years.

Mr. Jackson: The following table shows the TEC operational budgets for 1990-91 and 1991-92. Information for Scottish local enterprise companies is for the Secretary of State for Scotland to provide. Budgets are for the period of TEC operation only and vary in the periods they cover because of the differing operational dates of TECs.

Allocation

TEC	*1990-91*	*£ million 1991-92*
South East		
Essex (23 July 1990)	14·685	29·162
Hampshire (17 September 1990)	13·447	31·963
Heart of England (17 September 1990)	4·355	10·733
Hertfordshire (30 April 1990)	10·413	19·527
Isle of Wight (15 October 1990)	1·588	4·123
Kent (12 November 1990)	8·738	32·172
Milton Keynes and North Buckinghamshire (17 September 1990)	3·125	6·488
Surrey (1 April 1991)	Nil	14·070
Sussex (1 April 1991)	Nil	25·984
Thames Valley Enterprise (30 April 1990)	12·241	19·784
London		
AZTEC (12 November 1990)	2·720	10·742
CENTEC (16 September 1991)	Nil	11·951
CILNTEC (14 October 1991)	Nil	8·124
LETEC (1 April 1991)	Nil	27·618
North London (16 September 1991)	Nil	9·690
North West London (16 September 1991)	Nil	5·625
SOLOTEC (1 April 1991)	Nil	18·555
South Thames (27 May 1991)	Nil	20·510
West London (16 September 1991)	Nil	8·945
South West		
Avon (1 April 1991)	23·292	29·263
Devon and Cornwall (30 April 1990)	43·095	52·475
Dorset (30 April 1990)	11·528	15·488
Gloucester (7 January 1991)	9·833	13·010
Somerset (23 July 1990)	10·186	13·259
Wiltshire (1 April 1991)	8·637	12·766
West Midlands		
Birmingham (12 November 1990)	11·578	46·456
Central England (1 April 1991)	Nil	10·975
Coventry (17 September 1990)	13·622	25·768
Dudley (1 April 1991)	Nil	11·203
Hereford and Worcester (1 April 1991)	Nil	10·141
Sandwell (1 April 1991)	Nil	11·427
Shropshire (1 April 1991)	Nil	13·460
Staffordshire (15 October 1990)	16·335	34·627
Walsall (15 October 1990)	4·463	23·544
Wolverhampton (1 April 1991)	Nil	11·564
East Midlands and Anglia		
Leicester (1 April 1991)	Nil	26·339
Northants (1 April 1991)	Nil	12·852
Lincolnshire (1 April 1991)	Nil	8·174
Greater Nottingham (1 April 1991)	Nil	21·420
North Nottingham (25 June 1960)	11·329	16·965
South Derbyshire (7 January 1991)	3·170	17·607
North Derbyshire (1 April 1991)	Nil	11·544
Norfolk and Waveney (12 November 1990)	8·461	22·888
Suffolk (12 November 1990)	4·534	14·243
Bedfordshire (1 April 1991)	Nil	12·137
Greater Peterborough (4 February 1991)	0·902	8·174

TEC	1990-91	1991-92
CAMBSTEC (4 February 1991)	0·373	6·362
Yorkshire and Humberside		
Leeds (15 October 1990)	10·035	22·497
North Yorkshire (25 June 1990)	10·819	17·006
Bradford (7 January 1991)	5·543	18·696
Calderdale/Kirklees (3 April 1990)	18·138	20·592
Wakefield (7 January 1991)	3·720	12·231
Barnsley and Doncaster (7 January 1991)	6·631	25·705
Sheffield (1 October 1990)	11·625	24·206
Rotherham (30 July 1990)	7·157	12·127
Humberside (2 April 1991)	Nil	37·537
North West		
Bolton and Bury (15 October 1990)	6·400	12·900
CEWTEC (1 April 1991)	Nil	21·000
Cumbria (30 April 1990)	14·900	17·300
ELTEC (29 May 1990)	13·500	17·300
LAWTEC (1 April 1991)	Nil	26·300
Manchester (12 November 1990)	12·600	38·500
METROTEC (23 July 1990)	7·000	10·500
Oldham (30 April 1990)	7·600	8·600
QUALITEC (1 April 1991)	Nil	9·300
Rochdale (30 April 1990)	5·500	6·500
South and East Cheshire (9 April 1990)	8·300	10·900
Stockport and High Peak (20 August 1990)	5·500	9·700
Merseyside (24 June 1991)	Nil	41·600
NORMID (24 June 1991)	Nil	11·900
Northern		
Teeside (30 April 1990)	31·057	34·565
Tyneside (30 April 1990)	33·113	45·908
Wearside (30 April 1990)	18·494	21·484
Durham (1 October 1990)	16·454	34·380
Northumberland (17 September 1990)	6·214	15·639
Wales		
Gwent (4 February 1991)	2·400	18·400
North East Wales (17 September 1990)	6·200	13·600
North West Wales (4 February 1991)	1·800	13·600
Mid Glamorgan (23 July 1990)	14·900	21·100
Powys (2 April 1991)	Nil	4·800
South Glamorgan (4 February 1991)	3·400	14·100
West Wales (23 July 1990)	20·400	31·500

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria he has set down for the circumstances in which training and enterprise councils may fund visits to overseas conferences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: We have given training and enterprise councils a great deal of freedom of action to carry out the plans on which the Department contract with them. It is for them to decide on matters of this kind.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of the costs of the visit to the conference on partnership in education, in Washington DC which are being borne by the Teesside training and enterprise council.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils have been given an important role in ensuring that education and training are relevant to the needs of local business. Through the contract the Department has with each TEC we agree the overall outputs they will achieve for the funding they receive. As such, detailed matters such as attendance at conferences are for the TEC itself to decide.

Construction Statistics

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the numbers employed in the construction industry in each year since 1981.

Mr. Jackson: The information is shown in the table.

Employees in construction in the United Kingdom

September	Thousands (seasonally adjusted)
1981	1,096
1982	1,062
1983	1,051
1984	1,045
1985	1,011
1986	987
1987	1,023
1988	1,044
1989	1,091
1990	1,077
1991	951

Youth Training

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide for Greater London a table showing the number of YTS and YT places *(a)* available and *(b)* filled, for June of each year from 1988 to 1991, or the nearest available month.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested.

All young people under 18 who are not in full-time education or a job and are seeking youth training are entitled to the offer or re-offer of a suitable training place.

Additionally, young people who are aged 18 or over who have not previously been available for YT because of disability, ill health, pregnancy, custodial sentence, remand, language difficulty or care order are entitled to the offer of a suitable training place.

The Government remain committed to meeting their guarantee in London as elsewhere.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Private Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if prison inmates in privately-run prisons will be able to petition against governor's adjudications in such prisons; to whom they will make their application; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Disciplinary proceedings at privately-run prisons will be the responsibility of the on-site controller, a crown servant. Inmates will be able to appeal to the head of the remands contracts unit, a division in prison service headquarters, against an adjudication.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will require privately run prisons to produce annual reports; to whom those reports will be sent; and who will be able to take action upon recommendations made in such a report.

Mrs. Rumbold: Private contractors who are responsible for managing prisons will not be required to produce an

annual report. Instead they will have to provide regular management information to the on-site controller, a crown servant who will be monitoring their performance to ensure that they comply with the terms of the contract.

Belmarsh Prison, London

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the present number of vacancies of prison officers and their grades at Belmarsh prison, London; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Staff have been provided to operate the four house blocks and three of the four spurs of the category A unit at Belmarsh. There are vacancies in the specialist prison officer grades for three senior hospital officers, one officer instructor, one principal officer works and two works officers.

Visitor Visas

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many overseas domestic workers entering the United Kingdom have been issued with visitor visas prohibiting employment since 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not available.

Bail and Probation Hostels

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of occasions in the last year for which records are available when grants from his Department to bail and probation hostels and institutions run by charitable organisations have been paid late; and in how many cases over the same period interest and charges on overdrafts incurred by the charity as a result of late payment have been refunded.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office awards grants to a wide range of charitable organisations and the information requested could not be obtained without disproportionate costs.

Grants to bail and probation hostels are paid quarterly in advance but during the latter part of the year actual expenditure may exceed planned expenditure for justifiable reasons. In these circumstances interest charges are reimbursed in the final grant claim but the amounts are not separately identified. In the case of grants awarded to charitable organisations who provide other supported accommodation for offenders there have been no claims for a refund of interest charges on overdrafts.

Escaped Prisoners

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the escape of prisoners from police custody while being transported from Walton prison to the magistrates' court on 21 January.

Mrs. Rumbold: On the morning of 21 January, 15 prisoners were being escorted to Liverpool magistrates' court, under the supervision of eight staff from Her Majesty's prison, Liverpool. The coach had travelled only a short distance from the prison, when the majority of the prisoners moved en masse and attacked staff; it is believed that the prisoners were armed with knives. A fierce struggle ensued, during which three members of staff and two prisoners sustained injuries. Several windows of the coach were kicked out and a total of six prisoners succeeded in making good their escape, although still handcuffed. Initially eight prisoners succeeded in escaping through the coach windows but two were immediately restrained by prison staff.

Four of the six escaped prisoners were arrested by police within 40 minutes of the escape and all are facing further criminal charges. These four prisoners will be located in a prison other than Her Majesty's prison, Liverpool. Two prisoners remain unlawfully at large.

The injured staff and prisoners were taken to the accident and emergency department of Walton general hospital. Of the three staff, one sustained a deep wound to the forearm, another wounds to his arms and face and the third head and leg injuries. All three staff are now recovering from their injuries in their own homes. The two injured prisoners sustained, respectively, a cut to the neck; and a fractured jaw and a suspected fractured arm. One of the inmates remains in Walton general hospital while the other is recovering in Liverpool prison hospital.

A full inquiry into the circumstances of this incident will commence on 23 January 1992 led by the governor of Her Majesty's prison Birmingham.

Obscene Publications

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to reform the law of obscenity in order to prevent the publication of books openly advocating sadism, incest, bestiality, genocide, cannibalism and other such practices.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* The Government fully recognise the need for the law to deal effectively with those who would seek to profit from the trade in pornography. We have introduced or supported a range of measures strengthening the law in relation to child pornography, indecent displays, video recordings and broadcasting. Previous attempts to reform the Obscene Publications Act 1959 and 1964 did not command sufficient support in Parliament but we remain willing to support any apropriate proposals which would make the law more effective and which would appear to command public and parliamentary endorsement.

WALES

Electrical Goods Industry

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what household electrical goods are currently made in Wales; what steps he is taking to promote this industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The main household electrical goods currently made in Wales are as follows:

Colour televisions
Video cassette recorders
CD/Hi-Fi systems
Microwave ovens
Washing machines
Dishwashers
Tumble dryers

In the case of colour televisions, video recorders,

microwave ovens and washing machines production in Wales accounts for over 50 per cent. of the total United Kingdom output.

I continually refer to the strengths of Welsh industry in my discussions with various industrialists and organisations both here and overseas.

Cancer

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each of the last five years the number of new cases whose diagnosis was confirmed in that year for the following cancer types: *(a)* lung, *(b)* colorectal, *(c)* breast, *(d)* lymphoma, *(e)* pancreatic, *(f)* leukaemia, *(g)* ovarian, *(h)* melanoma and *(i)* cervical.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The latest available published information for usual residents of Wales are given in the table:

Registrations of newly diagnosed cancer cases

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*
Trachea, bronchus and lung	2,153	2,202	2,237	2,324	2,168
Colorectal[1]	1,562	1,723	1,759	1,835	1,686
Breast (female)	1,505	1,541	1,532	1,711	1,532
Breast (male)	12	14	21	27	15
Lymphoma[2]	284	364	319	416	355
Pancreas	349	404	438	395	381
Leukaemia[3]	274	305	298	315	309
Ovary and other uterine adnexa	303	343	346	344	318
Malignant melanoma of skin	125	174	148	174	197
Cervix uteri	242	344	353	375	351

Source: Welsh Cancer Registry.

[1] Includes colon and rectum.

[2] Includes Hodgkin's disease.

[3] Includes, lymphoid, myeloid, monocytic and other unspecified leukaemia.

Water Pollution

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish on a county by county basis the number of abandoned coal mines in Wales which continue to discharge ferriginous material to surface waters.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	2
Gwynedd	—
Powys	—
Dyfed	1
West Glamorgan	9
Mid Glamorgan	7
South Glamorgan	—
Gwent	2

Source: National Rivers Authority

Urban Environment

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment has been made by his Department of the effect of the European Community's Green Paper on the urban environment upon strategic planning processes in Welsh local authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The European Community Green Paper on the urban environment, published in 1990, was welcomed by the Government. The Community has subsequently set up an expert group to consider how the proposals in the Green Paper should be taken forward. The United Kingdom is represented on the group and we will, in due course, assess the effect of its findings on the strategic planning process in Welsh local authorities.

"Free for All"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the videocassette and transcript of the television programme, "Free For All," broadcast on Channel Four on 9 January.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes.

Neath and Port Talbot Hospital

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when invitations for tender were issued for the first contracts for the new Neath and Port Talbot hospital; and when they are expected to be returned.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: On current programming, I understand that West Glamorgan health authority anticipates being able to invite tenders for the first infrastructure contract in the second half of 1992.

Neighbourhood Hospitals

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer on 20 January, *Official Report*, column *76*, what guidance he has issued to Welsh health authorities contemplating the development of neighbourhood hospitals concerning the incorporation of national health service nursing homes; how residents and patients of such nursing homes are to be funded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The "Caring for People" White Paper (Cm. 849) makes it clear that health authorities will need to ensure that their plans allow for the provision of continuing residential health care for highly dependent people who need it. Whether this requires an increase or reduction in the level of continuous health care provided under the national health service will depend very much on local circumstances. Our subsequent guidance on the development of joint plans for social and community care by health and social services authorities and others confirms that they should agree the level and form of continuous care which will be secured for their local population. Any such care provided under the national health service, whether contracted by a health authority from an national health service facility or from a private or voluntary sector provider, will be free of charge to the patient.

SCOTLAND

Toxoplasmosis

Mr. McMaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will implement a campaign to educate pregnant women and their health carers about toxoplasmosis and its prevention in Scotland;

(2) which health authorities in Scotland provide information on infectious disease during pregnancy to pregnant women; which health authorities provide specific

information about the prevention of toxoplasmosis to pregnant women; which health authorities in Scotland routinely test pregnant women for toxoplasmosis; and which test pregnant women on demand for toxoplasmosis;

(3) what representations he has received on toxoplasmosis.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A new leaflet containing advice on toxoplasmosis and other infections has recently been issued to health boards by the Health Education Board for Scotland for the guidance of pregnant women. The leaflet, which is published by the Department of Health and entitled "While you are pregnant: safe eating and how to avoid infection from food and animals", encourages pregnant women to take precautions when handling and consuming food and in their contacts with animals.

Health boards do not routinely test pregnant women for toxoplasmosis and no information is available centrally about the availability of such a test on demand.

In the last 12 months, my right hon. Friend has received five inquiries about toxoplasmosis, all from hon. Members.

Stobhill Maternity Unit

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the number of times in the past year that Greater Glasgow health board has advertised for neo-natal nurses for the Stobhill maternity unit; and where the advertisements were placed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The board has not needed to advertise for neo-natal nurses at Stobhill over the past year.

British Steel

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what public funds British Steel has received in grants for the development of its Scottish plants, including Ravenscraig, since privatisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: British Steel has received no public funds for the development of its Scottish plants since privatisation. Any application for state aid for that purpose would have to be considered in the context of the relevant EC regulations.

Lingerbay Quarry Development

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to publish the result of the aggregates in Scotland working party survey completed in 1989; and whether he intends to have the survey updated before he decides whether or not to call in the planning decision due to be given on the Lingerbay quarry development.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend is still considering the results of the aggregates in Scotland working party survey and is not yet in a position to predict a date for publication of the findings. He has no plans, for the present, to have the survey updated before he decides whether or not to call in the application for planning permission made by Redlands Aggregates Ltd. for development at Lingerbay near Rodel on the Isle of Harris.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether his office will be commissioning their own independent assessment of the potential effects upon the local marine environment of ballast dumping in Lingerbay in connection with any quarry development.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Office officials are already looking into the possible implications for the marine environment of any project that may go ahead, including any effects that might arise from discharges of ballast water and potential discharges into the sea from quarrying operations. Any marine construction works would need a licence under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. A detailed assessment of the impact of the project as a whole on the marine environment would be required before such a licence was issued.

Social Security Commissioners

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what request he has had from the Social Security Commissioners in Edinburgh for additional qualified staff to process appeals.

Mr. Lang: To date no such request has been received from the Commissioners.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Pensioners

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on extending the limit of war pension to be disregarded in calculating housing benefit and the community charge.

Miss Widdecombe: The statutory disregard on war widows' and war disablement pensions was doubled to £10 in April 1990. In addition, local authorities have discretion to enhance this disregard at their own expense when assessing entitlement to housing benefit and community charge benefit. There is a full statutory disregard of the special payments for pre-1973 war widows—currently £44·36 a week. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the councils which *(a)* operate and *(b)* do not operate a total disregard scheme for war pensioners for housing benefit and the community charge.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested, as reported by local authorities in the financial year 1990-91, as listed in the following table.

Local authorities operating a total disregard scheme for both war disablement and war widows' pensions

Aberconwy	Aberdeen[1]
Allerdale	Amber Valley[2]
Angus[1]	Annandale[1]
Arfon	Argyll-Bute[1]
Arun	Ashfield
Ashford	Badenoch[1]
Banff and Buchan[1]	Basingstoke
Bassetlaw	Bearsden and Milngavie[1]
Berwickshire[1]	Birmingham
Blackpool	Blaenau Gwent
Borders[1]	Boston

Bracknell
Braintree
Brentwood
Broxbourne
Burnley
Calderdale
Carlisle
Castle Point
Ceredigion
Chelmsford
Cherwell
Chiltern
Clackmannan[1]
Clydesdale[1]
Congleton
Cotswold
Craven
Cumbernauld (DC)[1]
Cumnock and Doon[1]
Dacorum
Daventry
Dumbarton[1]
Dundee[1]
Ealing
East Devon
East Hertfordshire
East Kilbride (DC)[1]
East Lothian[1]
East Yorkshire
Edinburgh[1]
Elmbridge
Epsom and Ewell
Ettrick and Lauderdale[1]
Fife[2]
Forest of Dean
Gillingham
Glasgow[1]
Gloucester
Gordon[1]
Grampian[2]
Guildford
Halton
Hammersmith
Harlow
Hartlepool
Hertsmere
Hinckley and Bosworth
Hounslow
Huntingdon
Inverclyde[1]
Ipswich
Isles of Scilly
Islwyn
Kensington and Chelsea
Kincardine and Deeside[1]
Kirklees
Lambeth
Leicester
Lewisham[3]
Liverpool
Llanelli
Lothian[2]
Macclesfield
Maldon
Medina
Mendip
Mid Bedfordshire
Mid Suffolk
Milton Keynes
Monklands[1]
Moray
Nairn[1]
Newark
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Northampton
North Bedfordshire
North East Derby
North Hertfordshire
North Shropshire[3]
North Warwickshire
Bradford
Brent
Brighton
Broxtowe
Caithness[1]
Cardiff
Carrick
Central[1]
Charnwood
Cheltenham
Chesterfield
Christchurch
Clydebank[1]
Colwyn
Copeland
Coventry
Crewe and Nantwich
Cumbernauld (Kils.)[1]
Cunninghame[1]
Dartford
Delyn
Dumfries and Galloway[2]
Dunfermline[1]
East Cambridgeshire
East Dorset (Wimb.)
East Kilbride[1]
Eastleigh
Eastwood[1]
Eden
Ellesmere Port
Epping Forest
Erewash
Falkirk[1]
Forest Heath
Gedling
Glanford
Glenrothes[1]
Glyndwr
Gosport
Great Yarmouth
Hackney
Hamilton[1]
Harborough
Harrow[3]
Hereford
Highland[2]
Horsham
Hove
Hyndburn
Inverness[1]
Irving (DC)[1]
Islington
Kennet
Kilmarnock[1]
Kingswood
Kyle and Carrick[1]
Lancaster
Lewes
Lichfield
Livingston (DC)[1]
Lochaber[1]
Luton
Maidstone
Mansfield
Melton
Merton
Midlothian[1]
Mid Sussex
Mole Valley
Mongomery
Motherwell[1]
Neath
Newbury
Nithsdale[1]
Northavon
North Cornwall
North East Fife[1]
North Kesteven
North Tyneside
North West Leicester
North Wiltshire
Nuneaton
Orkney
Peterborough
Radnor
Redditch
Renfrew[1]
Richmondshire
Rochester on Medway
Ross and Cromarty[1]
Rother
Rugby
Rushmoor
Salford
Scottish Homes[1]
Sedgefield
Selby
Shetland
Slough
South Bedfordshire
South Cambridgeshire
Southend on Sea
South Kesteven[4]
South Northants
South Ribble
South Staffordshire
Southwark
Spelthorne
St. Albans
St. Helens
Stockport
Stratford on Avon
Stroud
Sutherland[1]
Swale
Tamworth
Tayside[2]
Test Valley
Thanet
Three Rivers
Trafford
Vale of White Horse
Walsall
Wandsworth
Wansdyke
Waverley
Western Isles
Westminster
West Wiltshire
Winchester
Wirral
Wolverhampton
Worthing
Nottingham
Ogwr
Perth and Kinross[1]
Purbeck
Redbridge
Reigate and Banstead
Rhuddlan
Richmond-upon-Thames
Rochford
Rossendale[3]
Roxburgh[1]
Rushcliffe
Rutland
Sandwell
Scunthorpe
Sefton
Sevenoaks
Skye and Lochalsh[1]
Solihull
South Bucks
South Derbyshire
South Holland
South Lakeland
South Oxfordshire
South Shropshire
South Tyneside
South Wight
Staffs. Moorland
Sterwartry[1]
Stirling[1]
Stoke on Trent
Strathkelvin[1]
Suffolk Coastal
Sutton
Tameside
Tandridge
Tendring
Tewesbury
The Wrekin
Tower Hamlets
Tweeddale[1]
Wakefield
Waltham Forest
Wansbeck
Watford
Wellingborough[4]
West Lothian[1]
West Oxfordshire
Wigtown[1]
Windsor and Maidenhead
Wokingham
Woodspring
Wycombe

Local authorities operating a total disregard scheme for war disablement pensions only

Bath
Blackburn
Bromley
Cambridge
Doncaster
East Staffordshire
Grimsby
Havering
Newport
Ribble Valley
South Somerset
Stockton on Tees
Torfaen
Vale Royal
Blaby
Bolton
Bury
Corby
Dudley
Exeter
Hambleton
Middlesbrough
Oldham
Southampton
Stevenage
Torbay
Tunbridge Wells
York

Local authorities operating a total disregard scheme for war widows' pensions only

Castle Morpeth
Chester
Kirkaldy[1]
Monmouth
Thurrock

Local authorities not operating a total disregard scheme for war disablement and war widows' pensions

Adur	Alnwick
Alyn and Deeside	Aylesbury Vale
Babergh	Barking
Barnet	Barnsley
Barrow in Furness	Basildon
Basildon (DC)[1]	Berwick-upon-Tweed
Beverley	Bexley
Blyth Valley	Bolsover
Boothferry	Bournemouth
Breckland	Brecknock
Bridgnorth	Bristol
Broadland	Bromsgrove
Camden	Cannock Chase
Canterbury	Caradon
Carmarthen	Chester le Street
Chichester	Chorley
City of London	Cleethorpes
Colchester	Corby New Town[1]
Crawley	Croydon
Cynon Valley	Darlington
Derby	Derbyshire Dales
Derwentside	Dinefwr
Dover	Durham
Dwyfor	Easington
Eastbourne	East Hampshire
East Lindsey	East Northampton
Enfield	Fareham
Fenland	Fylde
Gateshead	Gravesham
Greenwich	Haringey
Harrogate	Hart
Hastings	Havant
High Peak	Hillingdon
Holderness	Kerrier
Kettering	Kingston upon Hull
Kingston upon Thames	Knowsley
Langbaurgh	Leeds
Leominster	Lincoln
Lliw Valley	Malvern Hills
Manchester	Meirionnydd
Merthyr Tydfil	Mid Devon
Newcastle upon Tyne	New Forest
Newham	North Devon
North Dorset	North Norfolk
Norwich	Oadby and Wigston
Oswestry	Oxford
Pendle	Penwith
Plymouth	Poole
Portsmouth	Port Talbot
Preseli	Preston
Reading	Restormel
Rhondda	Rhymney Valley
Rochdale	Rotherham
Runnymede	Rural Wales[1]
Ryedale	Salisbury
Scarborough	Sedgemoor
Sheffield	Shepway
Shrewsbury and Atcham	South Hams
South Herefordshire	South Norfolk
South Pembrokeshire	Stafford
St. Edmundsbury	Strathclyde[2]
Sunderland	Surrey Heath
Swansea	Taff-Ely
Taunton Deane	Teesdale
Teignbridge	Telford[1]
Thamesdown	Tonbridge and Malling
Torridge	Tynedale
Uttlesford	Vale of Glamorgan
Warrington	Warrington (DC)[1]
Warwick	Waveney
Wealden	Wear Valley
Welwyn Hatfield	West Devon
West Dorset	West Lancashire
West Lindsey	West Norfolk
West Somerset	Weymouth and Portland
Wigan	Woking
Worcester	Wrexham Maelor
Wychavon	Wyre
Wyre Forest	Ynys Mon

[1] Denotes those authorities responsible for housing benefit only.
[2] Denotes those authorities responsible for community charge benefit only.
[3] Denotes those authorities responsible for both benefits but who operate a scheme for housing benefit only.
[4] Denotes those authorities responsible for both benefits but who operate a scheme for community charge benefit only.

Old Age Pensions

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase pensions to the level of those received by old age pensioners in Germany.

Mr. Jack: The provision of incomes in retirement, including pensions, is structured on a different basis in the two countries and consequently it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons.

Benefit Deductions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the total number of people who are having poll tax deducted from their benefits at the latest available date and at three monthly intervals prior to that date.

Miss Widdecombe: I understand from the chief executive of the Benefits Agency that the information requested is available in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Budgets

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was spending on the total social security budget in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1990-91.

Miss Widdecombe: Total social security spending was as follows.

	£ million
1978-79	16,602
1982-83	33,000
1986-87	46,851
1990-91	59,001

[1] Estimated outturn.

National Insurance

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the effect in 1991-92 and 1992-93, on both a first year and a full year basis, on the national insurance contributions of *(a)* employees, *(b)* employees and the self-employed, if (i) national insurance contributions were chargeable at the current rates on fringe benefits, (ii) national insurance contributions were chargeable at the current rates on unearned income of those under retirement age in excess of £60 per week, (iii) the ceilings on contributions were abolished, (iv) a combination of (i), (ii) and (iii) and (v) as (iv), but if the contracting-out rebates were abolished and the current 9 per cent. contribution rate was cut to 8 per cent.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is as follows:

(i) The yield in a full year for 1991-92 for employees in the United Kingdom is estimated to be £230 million.

The estimates are based on an employee contribution rate of 9 per cent.

Figures are not available for self-employed people.

The yield in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements made for collecting such a charge.

The yield for 1992-93 would depend on the level of employer-provided benefits in that year.

It is not possible to provide separate estimates for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

(ii) The yield in a full year for 1991-92 for individuals in the United Kingdom is estimated at:

	£ million
(a) Employees	640
(b) Employees and self-employed	810

The estimates are based on an employee contribution rate of 9 per cent.

The amount of revenue collected in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements for collecting such a charge.

The yield for 1992-93 would depend on the levels of investment income for that year. These estimates take no account of any behavioural changes following the introduction of such a charge.

The figures do not include people who are neither employees nor self-employed, but who nevertheless receive investment income.

It is not possible to provide separate information for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

(iii) Revenue yield

	First year £ billion	*Full year £ billion*
1991-92 (employees only)	2·2	2·5
1991-92 (employees plus self-employed)	2·4	2·9
1992-93 (employees only)	2·4	2·7
1992-93 (employees plus self-employed)	2·6	3·2

(iv) Revenue yield

	Full year £ billion
1991-92 (employees only)	3·8
1991-92 (employees plus self-employed)	4·3

All notes to parts (i) and (ii) apply here.

(v) Revenue yield

	Full year £ billion
1991-92 (employees only)	7·6
1991-92 (employees plus self-employed)	[1]8·2

All notes to parts (i) and (ii) apply here.

[1] Assumes that the Class 4 contribution rate remains at 6·3 per cent.

If the contracted-out rebates and 2 per cent. incentives in respect of personal pensions and 2 per cent. incentives for contracted-out schemes were also abolished, there would be additional yield of £2·9 billion in a full year in 1991-92.

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date he expects to receive the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee on the social fund.

Mr. Scott: We have not yet received a firm date from the Committee.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give most recent figures for reasons for refusals from the social fund for *(a)* budgeting loans, *(b)* crisis loans and *(c)* community care grants.

Mr. Scott: The figures for December 1991 are shown in the tables.

Budgeting loan

Reason for refusal	*Number*
Loan refused as Community Care Grant awarded	4,401
Not receiving Income Support	4,565
Not receiving Income Support for 26 weeks	12,750
Excluding Item(s)	1,325
Previous application and SFO decision for the item	2,272
Inability to repay	2,209
Insufficient priority	12,267
Other reasons	2,750

Crisis loans

Reason for refusal	*Number*
Excluded item(s)	101
Previous application and SFO decision for the item	171
No serious damage or risk to health or safety	3,202
Suitable alternative available	133
Help available from another source	305
Enough money for a crisis	114
Inability to repay	433
Insufficient priority	194
Other reasons	732

Community care grants

Reason for refusal	*Number*
Savings over £500 sufficient to meet cost	113
Not in receipt of income support and unlikely to become entitled	4,282
Excluded item(s)	1,414
Excluded applicant	384
Amount less than £30, not travelling expenses	245
Previous application and SFO decision for the item	2,164
Insufficient priority	5,279
Direction 4 not satisfied	39,253
Other reasons	1,483

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was left in each of the local office social fund budgets on Merseyside in November and December; and whether any offices received or applied for additional resources.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who seek a review of a social fund decision received a favourable decision at *(a)* social fund officer level and *(b)* social fund inspector level.

Mr. Scott: Information on the number of decisions revised in the applicant's favour for the period 1 April to 31 December 1991 is shown in the table.

	Numbers
Number of decisions by Social Fund officer	44,487
Number of decisions substituted by Social Fund inspector	2,981

Notes:
1. Figures refer to numbers of cases not numbers of people.
2. Decisions revised at social fund officer level include cases referred back by social fund inspectors for re-determination by higher executive officer (social fund).

Disability Allowances

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants will be worse off if they claim disability working allowance instead of invalidity benefit including housing costs.

Mr. Scott: The great majority of potential disability working allowance recipients will be better off than they would be on invalidity benefit. It is not possible to estimate with confidence the small number of invalidity benefit recipients who would be worse off taking into account help with housing costs from income support or housing benefit.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women over the age of 60 years have been awarded *(a)* invalid care allowance and *(b)* severe disablement allowance as a result of recent case law.

Mr. Scott: Following decisions of the social security commissioners in 1988, there have been some 1,600 awards of invalid care allowance to women over age 60. Figures for severe disablement allowance are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about cold weather payments made in Bradford.

Mr. Scott: Bradford and District Age Concern wrote to me on several occasions between July 1991 and November 1991.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many times, in the last three months, to date the weather stations in Leeds and Wilsden have triggered cold weather payments to people living in Bradford; which Bradford postcode areas were not covered by the payments triggered by Leeds between 6 and 13 December; when the local office in Bradford was notified of the payments; when recipients were informed; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he is taking to ensure cold weather payments are made to the maximum number of eligible people living in Bradford on a predicted temperature basis; and what arrangements are being made to ensure that local offices and the public are given prior notice of when payments are to be made.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Take-up Campaign

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many claimants on Merseyside have requested a review of their supplementary benefit entitlement under the recent regulation 72 take-up campaign; how many have had their requests for review refused; how many have received payments; and how many are pending;

(2) how many cases have been identified by his Department's offices on Merseyside for eligibility for an ex gratia compensation payment due to delays in paying benefit.

(3) how many additional staff and how much additional resources have been allocated to each office on Merseyside to cope with work arising from the regulation 72 take-up campaign for arrears of benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Press and Publicity

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list *(a)* the number of staff and *(b)* the total cost, of the press and publicity section of his Department for each year since July 1988.

Miss Widdecombe: For the numbers of staff, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 9 May 1991 at col. *579*;

For the available information on total costs up to 1989-90, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras on 17 June 1991 at cols. *49-50*.

The total staff and running costs in 1990-91 were £1,218,560. This includes staff and resource costs for activities undertaken by the information division as a whole. Separate figures for staff and running costs for the press and publicity sections are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Teenagers)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide a table for Greater London showing the number of people aged 16, 17, and 18 years who were in receipt of each of housing benefit, unemployment benefit, and income supplement and the numbers of each age in receipt of any one of these benefits for October of each year since 1988.

Mr. Jack: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Patients)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much revenue is raised by reducing benefits for those in hospital for more than six weeks; how much this scheme costs to administer; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The reduction of benefits paid to people in hospital is not a revenue raising measure. The reductions are based on the view that public funds should not make double provision for the same needs. As the national health service provides free maintenance as well as free treatment, it has always been the policy that maintenance benefits, also paid out of public funds, should not continue to be paid in full indefinitely. Information on the total value of the reductions for all benefits and the administrative costs involved is not available.

Asthma

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action his Department has taken to publicise the changes in the occupational asthma scheme introduced in September.

Mr. Scott: The proposed changes were covered in a press release on 4 July announcing the introduction of our new disability benefits. A revised leaflet, NI 237, "Occupational Asthma" was issued this week to local offices.

DEFENCE

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Since 1 January 1989 the Department has placed 26 contracts with the Coopers and Lybrand group to a total value of £7·8 million. These contracts cover a wide variety of consultancy activities such as management information systems, the procurement executive information technology strategy, Royal Navy logistics and studies following on from the "Options for Change" studies.

SSN Warspite

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on where the SSN Warspite will be berthed on being de-commissioned.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: HMS Warspite is expected to be berthed for afloat storage by the end of March 1992.

Royal Navy (Support Infrastructure)

Sir John Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if final decisions have yet been made on the proposals announced in July for rationalising the Royal Navy's support infrastructure.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following extensive consultation, the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 16 July 1991 will now proceed. I can say, however, that the number of posts affected at Rosyth and Copenacre are respectively some 100 and 220 fewer than previously anticipated.

Royal Air Force (Organisation)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further changes are planned in the organisation of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work has continued on the structure of the Royal Air Force required for Britain's Defence for the 1990s. The following decisions have been taken:

It was announced in the statement on the Defence estimates that RAF Abingdon would close by May 1993. We now plan closure on 31 July 1992. The flying units from Abingdon, which comprise the Oxford and London university air squadrons and No. 6 Air Experience Flight will move to RAF Benson in July.

Following the announced withdrawal of the USAF from RAF Kemble it will no longer be economic to maintain the RAF maintenance tasks at the base. It is proposed that airfield operations should end on 31 March 1992—when US flying will also cease—and that the RAF will withdraw by 31 July 1992. In the meantime the Army will use RAF Kemble for vehicle storage on a temporary basis, while reviewing its longer term requirement for such a facility.

All flying training at RAF Brawdy will cease on 31 August 1992 as part of the general reorganisation of advanced flying and tactical weapons training which will be concentrated at RAF Valley and RAF Chivenor. RAF Brawdy will remain open and possible alternative uses will be explored.

Nuclear Weapons (CIS)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States have ben offered assistance to safeguard and destroy nuclear weapons;

(2) pursuant to his reply of 19 December, *Official Report*, column *285*, what was the date on which he first made clear to the authorities in the republics his willingness to provide assistance and advice on safeguarding and destroying nuclear weapons;

(3) what numbers and types of his Department's personnel and equipment he is prepared to make available to republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States to assist in safeguarding and destroying nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We and our allies have made clear on several occasions, to the authorities first in the former Soviet Union and more recently in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine, our concern that existing arms control agreements, including the non-proliferation treaty, be honoured. We have also made clear our willingness to provide assistance and advice on safeguarding and destroying nuclear weapons where necessary and practicable. The form any such assistance might take will be established in consultation with allies and the countries concerned.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of the ability of the facilities in the Russian Federation to destroy the strategic and tactical nuclear warheads that were due to be disposed of by the former Soviet Government.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Russian Federation has specialist facilities capable of carrying out nuclear warhead dismantlement. Together with our allies we are considering with the Russians the best way of providing appropriate assistance to help with this task.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his statement in the debate on nuclear

weapons, *Official Report*, 14 January, column 822, he will set out the source of his information that tactical nuclear weapons, including torpedoes, air-launched missiles or nuclear artillery shells, are located at 100 sites in 13 different republics of the former Soviet Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what calculation he has made of the length of time the nuclear warheads presently deployed in the individual republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States can remain operational without refurbishment in the central nuclear facility of Nizhnyaya Tura in Russia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Routine servicing would probably maintain the majority of warheads in their normal condition for several years. No nuclear warheads in the republics of the CIS can become operational or useable, however, without the implementation of appropriate command and control procedures.

Potton Island

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 16 December, columns *57-58*, any dispersal experiments with nuclear materials not involving firings took place at Potton island.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No such experiments have taken place at Potton island.

Uranium Dust, Kuwait

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any health tests were conducted on members of 21 EOD Squadron on their return from clean-up operations in Kuwait in 1991 to assess whether any depleted uranium dust was inhaled or ingested during their period of assistance to Royal Ordnance.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no reason to suppose that 21 EOD Squadron handled or otherwise came into contact with depleted uranium while in Kuwait. With this in mind, no additional health checks were instituted over and above the regular/routine health checks carried out on all service personnel.

"Toward Minimum Deterrence"

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of Aurora paper number 11, "Toward Minimum Deterrence: How Low Can We Go", edited by Peter Gizewski.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The MOD library does receive the publications of the Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament, but Aurora Paper Number 11 has not yet arrived.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his statement in the debate on nuclear defence, *Official Report*, 14 January, column 824, he will list the professional advisers, who are not civil servants, he has consulted on the level of minimal nuclear weapons needed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The professional advice referred to by my right hon. Friend is provided both by serving members of the armed forces and by civil servants, including scientific and technical staffs.

Uranium Use

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *19*, on uranium use, what was the nature of the operational reasons; and what were the dates of occurence and amounts of uranium involved in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It would not be in the national interest to provide the details requested.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Illegal Fishing

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he has recently taken, or is planning to take, on fisheries enforcement to counter illegal landings of fish.

Mr. Curry: A total of 277 offences were identified in 1991 relating to illegal landings of fish. Of these, 81 resulted in prosecutions and 92 in warnings; 104 are still outstanding. (All figures are provisional.) Enforcement procedures, both ashore and at sea, are kept under regular review to maximise their effectiveness in controlling illegal landings of fish and other breaches of EC or national legislation.

Foodstuffs (Health Claims)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from which organisations or individuals he has received representations on the health claims made by the Food Advisory Committee in its report on its review of food labelling and advertising 1990.

Mr. Maclean: Representations were received from:
Advertising Authority
Advertising Standards Authority
ASDA
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Public Analysts
Mr. R. Banks
Biscuit, Cake and Confectionery Alliance
Boots
British Meat Manufacturers Association
British Nutrition Foundation
British Retailers Association
British Soft Drinks Association
Consumers Association
Consumers in the European Community Group (UK)
Co-operative Union Ltd
Coronary Prevention Group
East Lothian District Council
Federation of Bakers
Food and Drink Federation
Food Law Group
Mr. L. G. Hanson
Health Education Authority
Incorporated Society of British Advertisers
Institute of Food Science and Technology
Kelloggs
Leatherhead Food R. A.
Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Trading Standards
MAFF Consumer Panel
Meat and Livestock Commission
Milk Marketing Board
National Consumer Council
National Farmers Union
National Housewives Association Ltd
Nestlé
Procter and Gamble
Proprietory Association of Great Britain

Quaker Oats
Retail Consortium
Robert Gordon Institute of Technology
Roche
Sainsburys
Royal College of Physicians
Scottish Association of Master Bakers
United Kingdom Association of Frozen Food Manufacturers
United Kingdom Federation of Business and Professional Women
United Kingdom Home Economics Federation

A full list of respondents to the consultation exercise has been placed in the Library of the House; copies of responses can be inspected, by appointment, at the Ministry's library at 3 Whitehall place.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the EC directive on health claims for foodstuffs to be published.

Mr. Maclean: I understand that the European Commission's intended proposals on health and other food claims are unlikely to be issued until later this year.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will announce his conclusions on the Food Advisory Committee's report on its review of food labelling and advertising 1990.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Advisory Committee has recently considered the response to the public consultation on the recommendations made in its report. I expect to receive shortly any further advice from the committee and shall consider this, together with the comments made by those responding to the committee's original recommendations, before making any final decisions and taking any further action. I shall make my announcement as soon as possible thereafter.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy regarding health claims and food labelling prior to the EC's amendment of 79/112/EC (Food Labelling).

Mr. Maclean: The Government's policy on food labelling, including health claims, is that food labels should enable consumers to make fully informed choices and should not mislead or confuse. I intend to announce the Government's response to the Food Advisory Committee's recommendations for further controls in this area as soon as I have received and considered the committee's final advice on its review of food labelling. I expect this to be in time to influence the European Commission's intended proposals on claims.

Sheep Scab

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his review of the control arrangements which apply when sheep scab is confirmed.

Mr. Gummer: Sheep scab is a particularly unpleasant disease which results in distress to sheep and financial loss to farmers. The new provisions simplify the control measures and place greater responsibility in the hands of the industry.

The Sheep Scab Order 1992, which replaces earlier legislation, retains sheep scab as a notifiable disease. Where infection is confirmed, movement restrictions will be put in place and farmers will be required to dip their sheep and complete declarations to that effect.

The main changes to the earlier legislation are:
reduction in the involvement of inspectors supervising dipping on infected premises;
simplification of the system for licensing movements; and
simplification of the affected area provisions.

Chicken Imports

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of chicken imports in 1990 and in 1991.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

	tonnes	
	1990	[1] *1991*
Total imports of chickenmeat into the United Kingdom	110,651	104,197

[1] January to November.
Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United Nations Agencies

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give a full list of United Nations agencies; and how much Britain contributed financially to each agency in cash and real terms for each year from 1979 to 1990.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government about the security forces preventing food and medical supplies from reaching people living in certain areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have frequently urged the Sri Lankan Government to take all necessary steps to ensure the well-being of all its citizens. Although we have heard of instances of goods being held up at military check points, we believe the Sri Lankan Government are now making serious efforts, in co-operation with relief agencies, to maintain the supply of food and medicines to people affected by fighting. Recently the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have created difficulties for food shipments into areas they control.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a senior member of the British High Commission in Sri Lanka last visited Jaffna; and what report was made, and to whom, following the visit.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The British High Commissioner in Colombo visited Jaffna from 23 to 26 May 1990 and reported on 28 May to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. Such visits have not been practicable since 11 June 1990, when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam renewed fighting against the Sri Lankan Government.

Mercenaries

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to sign the 1989 United Nations convention on the use, finance and training of mercenaries for activities which violate principles of international law.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. Implementation of the convention would require primary legislation. Following the consideration of the whole question by the Diplock committee, we decided not to introduce legislation on mercenaries. We still do not consider that the need for such legislation has been established.

Overseas Domestic Workers

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many United Kingdom posts abroad have available the IND leaflets containing advice for prospective overseas domestic workers seeking to accompany their employers to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Supplies of this leaflet have been sent to all 158 visa-issuing posts.

EC Legislation and Policy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 16 December, column *44*, about closer contacts between the European and national Parliaments, he will now make it his policy to answer substantive questions on reports prepared for committees of the European Parliament on EC legislation and policy.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I shall be happy to continue to provide replies when it is appropriate to do so.

Kuwait

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress made in Kuwait to establish democratic institutions and political processes since its liberation by allied forces in Operation Granby/Desert Storm in 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Kuwaitis are preparing for a general election, to which his Highness the Amir has said that he is personally committed, planned for October. The establishment of the Kuwait Democratic Forum, effectively the country's first publicly proclaimed political party, was announced in December 1991. The repeal of the 1986 press censorship law was announced this month. We welcome these developments.

East Timor

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West, *Official Report*, 13 December, column *596*, the special United Nations rapporteur to East Timor has now visited that country.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what current plans there are for a delegation by the current Portuguese presidency of the EC to East Timor to investigate human rights.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None to our knowledge.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning allegations that witnesses to the Santa Cruz massacre in East Timor were summarily shot by Indonesian security forces.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no reliable evidence to substantiate these allegations.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has regarding the Indonesianisation of East Timor with reference to educational and language policies.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The educational policies and curriculum in East Timor are similar to those applied in schools throughout Indonesia. As elsewhere, there are a number of Catholic schools in East Timor. One of these in Dili teaches in Portuguese. The official language of government in East Timor is Indonesian.

Indonesia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to modify Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Indonesia following the publication of the Indonesian military investigation into the massacre of civilians in November 1991 by Indonesian soldiers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. We will consider Her Majesty's Government policy towards Indonesia when we have received the full reports.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *10*, if he will list the Ministers of Her Majesty's Government who met with their Indonesian counterparts; and where each meeting took place.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: List of Ministers is as follows:

Mr. Eggar	Jakarta
Lord Caithness	Jakarta
Lord Arran	Jakarta
Mr. King	Jakarta
Mr. Sainsbury	London
Mr. Wakeham	London

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which of the former states of the Soviet Union *(a)* have been recognised by Her Majesty's Government as independent nations and *(b)* have signed or acceded to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Hurd: *(a)* The Government have recognised Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirgistan, Moldova, Tadikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan as independent sovereign states. We accept the Russian Federation as the continuing state of the Soviet Union.

(b) We regard Russia as a party to the non-proliferation treaty as continuing the statehood of the

former Soviet Union. No other former republics have yet acceded to the NPT. We have urged them all to do so as soon as possible.

IAEA

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the nuclear facilities currently identified in Iraq and those previously registered with the International Atomic Energy Agency for international inspection.

Mr. Douglas Hurd: Details of the sites visited by IAEA inspection teams under the authority of SCR 687 (1991) are given in the agency's inspection reports. These have been circulated as UN Security Council documents. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library.

The following facilities were declared to the IAEA for inspection purposes under Iraq's safeguards agreement with the IAEA of 29 February 1972.

(i) IRT-5000 research reactor: Tuwaitha, Baghdad
(ii) Tamuz 2 research reactor: Tuwaitha, Baghdad
(iii) ERLFF fuel fabrication plant: Tuwaitha, Baghdad
(iv) Separate storage facility: Tuwaitha, Baghdad

Albania

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Britain to re-establish full diplomatic relations with Albania; when an ambassador will be appointed in Tirana; and whether an embassy building has been purchased.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Britain re-established diplomatic relations with Albania on 29 May 1991 but a decision has yet to be taken on the form of our representation in Tirana. No embassy building has been purchased.

Defence and Disarmament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the resolutions on defence and disarmament *(a)* sponsored and *(b)* supported by the United Kingdom at the 46th regular session of the United Nations General Assembly; and if he will make a statement on reasons in each case for the way in which the United Kingdom voted.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the forty-sixth regular session of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Kingdom co-sponsored the following resolutions on defence and disarmament matters:—

46/25—Transparency of Military Expenditures.
46/26—Compliance with Arms Limitation and Disarmament Agreements.
46/35A—Third Review Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Publication of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction.
46/35B—Chemical and Bacteriological (Biological) Weapons: measure to uphold the authority on the 1925 Geneva Protocol.
46/35C—Chemical and Bacteriological (Biological) Weapons.
46/36F—Regional Disarmament, including Confidence-Building Measures.
46/36G—Confidence and Security-Building Measures and Conventional Disarmament in Europe.
46/36L—Transparency in Armaments.
46/36I—Regional Disarmament.

The United Kingdom supported the following resolutions on defence and disarmament matters:—

46/31—Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone in South Asia.
46/33—Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space.
46/27—Education and Information for Disarmament.
46/30—Establishment of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the region of the Middle East.
46/34B—Implementation of the Declaration on the Denuclearisation of Africa.
46/36A—Second Review Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Use of Prohibition on Military or Any Other Hostile Environmental Modification Techniques.
46/36B—Study on charting potential uses of resources allocated to military activities for civilian endeavours to protect the environment.
46/36C—Relationship between Disarmament and Development.
46/36E—Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Radiological Weapons.
46/36H—International Arms Transfers.
46/36K—Prohibition of the Dumping of Radioactive Wastes.
46/37A—World Disarmament Campaign.
46/37B—Regional Confidence-Building Measures.
46/37E—United Nations Disarmament Fellowship, Training and Advisory Services Programmes.
46/38A—Report of the Disarmament Commission.
46/38D—The Transfer of High Technology with Military Applications.
46/40—Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effect.

Space and time do not allow us to explain our voting in each, but details on individual resolutions can of course be provided if required.

Plutonium

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings Ministers or officials of his Department have had with representatives of non-governmental organisations from *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad regarding perceived risks of the international commerce in plutonium and other nuclear explosive materials.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: This subject was raised at my meeting with NGOs to discuss non-proliferation on 26 November 1991. More recently, Dr. David Lowry of the European proliferation information centre (EPIC) had a meeting with an official from non-proliferation and defence department at which this issue was discussed.

Libya (Lockerbie)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to utilise the procedure outlined in article 14.1 of the 1971 Montreal convention to refer to arbitration the jurisdictional dispute with the Government of Libya concerning the two men named in the warrant issued in relation to the bombing of Pan Am flight 103.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 21 January the Security Council adopted unanimously resolution 731. This urged the Libyan Government to provide a full and effective response to the requests addressed to it by the British, French and United States Governments, which include a demand for the surrender of those accused of the bombing of Pan Am flight 103. We await Libya's response.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Incomes Statistics

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the estimated income from a 9 per cent. levy on all unearned income over £3,000;

(2) what is the estimated number of people who have savings and occupational pensions producing more than £3,000 income per year.

Mr. Maude: A charge at 9 per cent. on the amount of any investment income and occupational pension above £3,000 would yield about £3·3 billion in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income. About 3¾ million people would be liable to the charge. These estimates take no account of any possible behavioural effects following the introduction of such a charge.

Defence Spending

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what adjustments to the Government's published plans for defence spending announced in the Autumn Statement will be necessary during the forthcoming financial years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

Plans for defence spending will be reviewed in the normal way in the autumn during the Government's annual survey of public expenditure.

Valuation Appeals

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will tabulate the amounts awarded so far under appeals against Inland Revenue assessment of non-domestic rate valuations for local authorities in England and Wales.

Mr. Maude: The information is not readily available at present and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Income Tax

Mr. Carr: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the yield/cost in 1991-92 and 1992-93 on both a first year and a full year basis of *(a)* raising the basic rate limit to taxable income of £29,000, *(b)* charging higher rate tax at 33 per cent. on taxable income between £29,000 and £46,000, *(c)* charging higher rate tax at 41 per cent. on taxable income above £46,000, *(d)* restricting all personal tax allowances to the basic rate, *(e)* restricting relief for pension contributions made by individuals to the basic rate, *(f)* a combination of *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)* and *(g)* a combination of *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(e)*.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of the increase in liability to income tax compared with statutory indexation in 1992-93 are as follows. They do not allow for any behavioural effects that might result from such a change to the tax system and do not include capital gains tax:

£ million

	Cost(-)/yield(+) in a full year at 1992-93 levels of income
Tax regime specified in *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)*	−1,530
(d) Restriction of all personal allowances to the basic rate	+1,460
(e) Restriction of pension contributions to the basic rate	+400
(f) Combination of *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)*	−820
(g) Combination of *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(e)*	−1,250

Approximately one half of the full year yield from such regimes would affect income tax receipts in the first year.

Nuclear Power Industry

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will revise the definition of the public sector borrowing requirement so as to treat equally the financing arrangements of British Nuclear Fuels and Nuclear Electric; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* No.

Privatisation Receipts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1979-80 the total Government receipts from privatisation, including debt repayment, indentifying the industry concerned in each case.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* Privatisation proceeds from 1979-80 to 31 March 1991, including the repayment of debt, are shown in the following table by industry.

Privatisation proceeds 1979-80 to 1990-91 (outturn)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Enterprise Oil	—	—	—	—	—	384	—	—	—	—	—	—
Forestry Commission	—	—	—	14	21	28	15	16	13	12	15	11
General Practice Finance Corporation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	67	—	—
Harland and Wolff	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	—
Land Settlement	—	—	—	—	2	12	5	2	—	—	—	—
Motorway Service Area Leases	—	—	—	4	1	—	—	2	1	—	2	7
National Enterprise Board Holdings	37	83	2	—	—	168	30	34	—	—	—	—
National Freight Consortium	—	—	[1]5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Professional and Executive Recruitment	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—
Plant Breeding Institute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]65	—	—	—
Rolls-Royce	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,029	3	—	—
Rover Group	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[3]150	—

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Royal Ordnance	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	186	—	—	—
Short Brothers	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	30	—
Water Holding Companies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	423	1,485
Wytch Farm	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	18	—	—	—	130
Miscellaneous[4]	64	84	189	57	15	4	−2	−4	−2	−13	−21	1
Amersham International	—	—	64	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Associated British Ports	—	—	—	46	—	51	—	—	—	—	—	—
BAA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	534	689	—	—
British Aerospace	—	43	—	—	—	—	347	—	—	—	—	—
British Airways	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	435	419	—	—	—
British Gas	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,570	1,758	1,805	804	500
British Petroleum	276	—	8	—	543	—	—	—	863	3,030	1,363	—
British Steel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,138	1,289	—
British Sugar	—	—	44	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
BT	—	—	—	—	—	1,402	1,307	1,384	273	335	92	100
Britoil	—	—	—	334	293	—	426	—	—	—	—	—
Cable and Wireless	—	—	181	—	263	—	577	—	—	—	—	—
Electricity (England and Wales)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	[6]3,358
TOTAL	[5]377	[5]210	[5]493	455	1,139	2,050	2,706	4,458	5,140	7,069	4,155	5,592

[1] £49 million of the £54 million proceeds paid into the pension fund to cover a deficit.
[2] The Central Government sector received £65 million but only £27 million was paid into the Consolidated Fund.
[3] Does not take into account the cost of deferring payments of consideration.
[4] Includes expenses which could not be netted off the associated sale because they arose in a financial year in which there were no proceeds from that sale.
[5] Excludes certain advance oil payments which net out to zero.
[6] Gross proceeds (costs yet to be reported to Parliament).

Privatisation Receipts

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year from 1992-93 the total receipts for privatisations which have been carried out, including debt repayments, identifying the industry concerned in each case.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* The equity proceeds expected to be received from 1992-93 for sales which have been carried out are shown in the following table. In addition, proceeds will be received in respect of BT loan stock, British Gas debt and the electricity companies' debt, although the precise timing of repayments depends on future decisions.

Privatisation proceeds

(£ million)

	1992-93	1993-94
Electricity		
England and Wales	2,124	—
Scotland	835	835
BT	3,707	—

HEALTH

Consultancy Services

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of management and accountancy consultancy services incurred by each health authority in England and Wales in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. In England decisions to employ management and accountancy consultants are a matter for individual health authorities.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Trust Funds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what were the trust fund balances held by each health authority in England and Wales on 31 March 1989, 1990 and 1991 in respect of capital reserves for *(a)* funds held in perpetuity and *(b)* other funds, distinguishing in each case between (i) general purposes and (ii) special purposes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what was *(a)* the total trust fund income and *(b)* total trust fund expenditure of each individual health authority in England and Wales in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Tables showing the information requested and derived from the annual trust fund accounts of health authorities and special trustees in England have been placed in the Library.

Health authorities are empowered under section 90 of the National Health Service Act 1977 to accept, hold and administer any property on trust for all or any purposes relating to the health service. Income and expenditure arising and balances accruing from the activities of third parties such as League of Friends and independently registered charitable trusts are not identifiable within the trust fund accounts of health authorities and are often accounted for separately.

The information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Doncaster Healthcare Trust

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names, qualifications, occupation, ages, employers and addresses of the chair and non-executive directors of the Doncaster healthcare trust.

Mr. Dorrell: The names of the chairman and non-executive directors of the Doncaster healthcare trust are as follows:

Chairman
Mr. Peter Horsburgh

Non-executive directors
Mr. John Millar
Mr. John Lucas
Mr. John Liversedge
Miss Carol Fleming
Mrs. Margaret Spencer

It is not the Government's policy to disclose the private addresses and other personal information about appointees to health authorities and trusts.

Nurses

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the latest statistics for the number of qualified nurses who have been unable to gain full-time employment in the nursing profession.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued to the appointed chairs of hospital trusts with respect to their personal use of NHS provisions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Domiciliary Care Service

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued by his Department to local authorities with regard to charging for domiciliary care service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Existing guidance is contained in the Department's circular LAC(84)7, a copy of which is available in the Library. We intend to produce new guidance about the discretionary powers available to local authorities to make charges for domiciliary and day care services.

Emergency Ambulance Calls

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* for each ambulance authority in England and *(b)* for each financial quarter of 1990-91 and for the first three quarters of 1991-92 the percentage of emergency calls reached (i) within seven minutes, (ii) within 14 minutes in urban areas and (iii) within 19 minutes in a rural area.

Mr. Dorrell: The information is not available in exactly the form requested.

Figures are collected centrally on a financial year basis, and the standards of seven and 14 minutes for metropolitan authorities and seven and 19 minutes for non-metropolitan authorities were not widely used until 1991-92.

The tables show the numbers and percentages of emergency calls being responded to within the standards of eight and 20 minutes for non-metropolitan authorities and seven and 14 minutes for metropolitan authorities for the financial year 1990-91 which are the latest available.

Patient transport services: Table 1
1990-91
Quality of service
Emergency calls: Response times: Non-Metropolitan authorities
England

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Number where response within 8 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 8 minutes*	*Time at 50th percentile (minutes)*
Cleveland	23,784	15,323	64·4	7·0
Cumbria	14,365	7,983	55·6	7·2
Durham	29,510	15,718	53·3	7·4
Humberside	42,384	31,381	74·0	5·6
North Yorkshire (1988-89 data)	19,241	12,652	65·8	6·1
Derbyshire	36,569	17,992	49·2	8·0
Leicestershire	31,498	16,693	53·0	8·0
Lincolnshire	15,552	9,967	64·1	7·0
Nottinghamshire	53,649	31,306	58·4	8·0
Cambridgeshire	18,090	7,628	42·2	8·5
Norfolk	24,856	13,545	54·5	6·9
Suffolk	11,510	5,972	51·9	7·3
Bedfordshire	20,641	11,807	57·2	8·0
Hertfordshire	36,873	21,386	58·0	8·0
Essex	62,301	31,335	50·3	7·8
East Sussex	36,268	24,122	66·5	7·0
Kent	56,701	33,526	59·1	8·0
Surrey	46,772	23,853	51·0	7·8
West Sussex	25,957	15,547	59·9	7·0
Dorset	26,264	15,096	57·5	7·0
Hampshire	44,148	23,444	53·1	7·5
Wiltshire	14,904	9,589	64·3	6·3
Isle of Wight	4,271	2,021	47·3	7·5
Berkshire	27,482	12,914	47·0	9·0
Buckinghamshire	18,776	10,347	55·1	7·0
Northamptonshire	16,608	9,978	60·1	7·1
Oxfordshire	17,891	9,107	50·9	8·0
Avon	33,098	19,693	59·5	7·4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	16,371	6,662	40·7	10·0
Devon	32,681	17,648	54·0	—
Gloucestershire	15,400	9,227	59·9	8·0
Somerset	11,014	6,077	55·2	6·8

Ambulance authority	Total number of emergency calls	Number where response within 8 minutes	Percentage of calls where response within 8 minutes	Time at 50th percentile (minutes)
Hereford and Worcester	19,915	11,553	58·0	8·0
Shropshire	12,348	6,269	50·8	8·0
Staffordshire	39,907	19,086	47·8	8–10
Warwickshire	11,441	7,016	61·3	7·6
Cheshire	36,718	20,624	56·2	7·0
Lancashire	73,640	49,421	67·1	7·6

Source: KA34—DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B) 1991.

Patient transport services: Table 2
1990-91

Quality of service
Emergency calls: Response times: Non-Metropolitan authorities

England

Ambulance authority	Total number of emergency calls	Number where response within 20 minutes	Percentage of calls where response within 20 minutes	Time at 95th percentile (minutes)
Cleveland	23,784	21,664	91·1	14·0
Cumbria	14,365	13,126	91·4	23·0
Durham	29,510	28,542	96·7	18·2
Humberside	42,384	42,231	99·6	13·6
North Yorkshire[1]	19,241	18,403	95·6	16·5
Derbyshire	36,569	35,249	96·4	18·0
Leicestershire	31,498	30,295	96·2	19·0
Lincolnshire	15,552	14,886	95·7	20·0
Nottinghamshire	53,649	51,747	96·5	18·0
Cambridgeshire	18,090	16,103	89·0	19·0
Norfolk	24,856	22,049	88·7	18·1
Suffolk	11,510	10,175	88·4	21·6
Bedfordshire	20,641	20,123	97·5	17·0
Hertfordshire	36,873	35,103	95·2	20·0
Essex	62,301	58,372	93·7	17·1
East Sussex	36,268	33,297	91·8	15·0
Kent	56,701	54,833	96·7	18·0
Surrey	46,772	45,368	97·0	15·6
West Sussex	25,957	24,288	93·6	25·0
Dorset	26,264	24,568	93·5	17·7
Hampshire	44,148	42,919	97·2	19·7
Wiltshire	14,904	14,562	97·7	16·9
Isle of Wight	4,271	3,582	83·9	19·5
Berkshire	27,482	25,593	93·1	19·0
Buckinghamshire	18,776	16,644	88·6	16·0
Northamptonshire	16,608	16,313	98·2	15·9
Oxfordshire	17,891	15,625	87·3	21·0
Avon	33,098	31,885	96·3	15·9
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	16,371	14,806	90·4	22·0
Devon	32,681	30,785	94·2	—
Gloucestershire	15,400	14,606	94·8	19·0
Somerset	11,014	10,143	92·1	20·2
Hereford and Worcester	19,915	19,028	95·5	18·0
Shropshire	12,348	11,415	92·4	20·0
Staffordshire	39,907	38,986	97·7	17·0
Warwickshire	11,441	10,983	96·0	19·5
Cheshire	36,718	32,080	87·4	16·0
Lancashire	73,640	72,810	98·9	15·7

[1] 1988-89 data.

Patient transport services: Table 3
Quality of service: Emergency calls; Response times; Metropolitan authorities

England

Ambulance authority	Total number of emergency calls	Number where response within 7 minutes	Percentage of calls where response within 7 minutes	Time at 50th percentile (minutes)
Northumbria Metropolitan	67,309	35,674	53·0	7·0
West Yorkshire Metropolitan	113,347	39,006	34·4	8·2
South Yorkshire Metropolitan	64,863	20,246	31·2	8·1
London Ambulance Service	456,695	50,390	11·0	12·0
West Midlands Metropolitan	117,191	60,822	51·9	7·3
Mersey Metropolitan	103,400	61,618	59·6	7·0
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	159,130	74,202	46·6	8·1

Source:
KA34 DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B) 1991.

Patient transport services: Table 4, 1990-91
Quality of service: Emergency calls; Response times; Metropolitan authorities

England

Ambulance authority	*Total number of emergency calls*	*Number where response within 14 minutes*	*Percentage of calls where response within 14 minutes*	*Time at 95th percentile (minutes)*
Northumbria Metropolitan	67,309	61,588	91·5	13·0
West Yorkshire Metropolitan	113,347	99,187	87·5	16·5
South Yorkshire Metropolitan	64,863	48,877	75·4	16·0
London Ambulance Service	456,695	336,734	73·7	21·0
West Midlands Metropolitan	117,191	103,245	88·1	19·0
Mersey Metropolitan	103,400	99,752	96·5	13·0
Greater Manchester Metropolitan	159,130	150,537	94·6	14·3

Source:
KA34 DH Statistics and Management Information (SM12B) 1991.

National Health Service Reform

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total cost of the production and distribution of the document "NHS Reforms—The First Six Months".

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total expenditure by the national health service management executive on the production and launch of the booklet "National Health Service Reforms—The First Six Months".

Mr. Dorrell: The estimated cost of producing, distributing and launching the booklet "NHS Reforms —The First Six Months" is £34,000.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the details of the forecasts of the financial position of each district health authority and national health service trust referred to in the national health service management executive's publication "National Health Service Reforms—The First Six Months."

Mr. Dorrell: The following district health authorities are referred to in the publication "National Health Service Reforms—The First Six Months":

Worcester
Northumberland
Riverside
North Derbyshire
West Dorset
Doncaster
Bromley
South Birmingham

The latest financial forecasts show each district health authority in surplus or balance for the year.

The following National Health Service trusts were also referred to in the report:

Southend Health Care
Northumbria Ambulance Services
United Bristol Healthcare
West Dorset Community Health
Freeman Group of Hospitals
Royal Free Hospital
Broadgreen Hospital

Each of these trusts is forecasting that it will meet its key financial duties of remaining within its external financing limit and achieving breakeven.

Press and Publicity

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of staff and *(b)* the total cost of the press and publicity section of the Department of Health for each year since July 1988.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the replies my hon. Friend and I gave the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 26 April 1991 at column *575* and 5 November 1991 at columns *103-104*.

Private Care Agencies

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward legislation to require the registration and regulation of private agencies concerned with the domiciliary of elderly and disabled persons.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to legislate for the compulsory registration and regulation of such agencies.

Hospitals

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring the national health service management executive undertakes of the state of hospital cleanliness.

Mr. Dorrell: As I explained in my reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) at column *151*, specifying the required standards of hospital cleanliness and ensuring they are maintained is the responsibility of local management.

The national health service management executive would, however, intervene if there were any indication that appropriate standards were not being applied.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the training available to national health service staff on the prevention of hospital acquired infections.

Mr. Dorrell: It is the responsibility of the relevant professional bodies, the Royal College of Pathologists and the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting to assess the adequacy of training for specialist staff in hospital acquired infection. These staff are in turn expected to provide the necessary training for non-specialist colleagues and it is the responsibility of local management to see that this happens.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has on hospital readmissions resulting from hospital acquired infections.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Health Authority Finance

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those health authorities receiving allocations from their regional health authorities risk money reserves.

Mr. Dorrell: Comprehensive information about allocations to district health authorities from regional health authorities' reserves is not held centrally.

Guardians Ad Litem

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis his Department is calculating the formula for distributing the specific grant for guardians ad litem.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are discussing with the local authority associations a formula based on the number of children aged under 18 and the number of care orders for each local authority averaged over the three years 1988-90.

Care Homes (Restraint)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify which forms of restraint in care homes are *(a)* acceptable and *(b)* unacceptable to his Department; and what guidance has been given to registration officers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Residents of residential care homes have a right to dignity, independence and choice.

The Residential Care Homes Regulations require that the owners and managers of homes should both safeguard and promote the welfare of residents and take proper account of their wishes and feelings. This is emphasised in "Home Life"—a code of practice for residential care published in 1984 and endorsed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. This is also emphasised in "Homes are for Living In", the social services inspectorate's model for evaluating care and the quality of life in homes for the elderly, and the inspectorate's current series of standards publications relating to homes for other client groups.

This guidance has been made available to those running homes and to local authority inspectors. Copies are also available in the Library.

Children's Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his latest estimate of the number of unqualified officers in charge and deputy officers in charge of children's homes in England.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A recent survey of 106 English local authorities indicated that 380 officers in charge and 926 deputy officers in charge of local authority maintained and controlled residential homes for children were not qualified to CQSW/CSS/DipSW standard.

Following the recommendation in Sir William Utting's report "Children in the Public Care", a copy of which is available in the Library, that all heads of homes should be suitably qualified, a special training initiative is being introduced from 1992-93 as a part of the training support programme to help local authorities ensure that this is achieved by 1995-96.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if national health service providers will be required to publish details of their record for incidences of hospital-acquired infections;

(2) what statistics are held centrally on the incidence of hospital-acquired infection.

Mr. Dorrell: Provider units are responsible for monitoring hospital-acquired infection (HAI) as part of their infection control procedures. It is for provider units to consider whether and in what form to make available the results of such monitoring, as it is for purchasing authorities to determine the measures of quality of service that they specify in contracts. However it is clear that factors leading to HAI and the methods used to record it are so many and varied that it would be impossible for health authorities to publish tables on the overall incidence of HAI which would be both accurate and comparable, and such figures are not collected centrally. In a reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on 16 January at column 627, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that the clinical standards advisory group in its forthcoming study, may wish to address the possibility of encouraging a greater degree of standardisation of data on HAI.

Fund Holding

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure by his Department on the general practitioner fund-holding scheme.

Mr. Dorrell: In the first year of the scheme 306 practices representing 1,720 GPs are managing a total budget of £397,600,000 to purchase health care for their patients. The benefits of fund holding are now widely recognised.

Risk Money Reserves

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline the criteria being used by the national health service management executive and regional health authorities in allocating money from the risk money reserves.

Mr. Dorrell: The reserves are there to provide health authorities with flexibility in managing risk throughout the year.

Haemodialysis Machines

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemodialysis machines are currently owned by the NHS.

Mr. Dorrell: Based on information from a sample of regions the estimated total is 2,500.

ENERGY

Non-Fossil Fuel Order

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if the extension beyond the current 1998 limit for renewable energy generation projects qualifying for a premium price under the Non-Fossil Fuel Order, which he

is negotiating with the European Commission will apply to wind energy-projects alone, or to all renewable projects qualifying under the Non-Fossil Fuel Order.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government wishes to see an extension of the fossil fuel levy for renewables beyond 1998, which would apply to all relevant renewable technologies, not just wind.

Natural Gas

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's estimate of the percentage of natural gas that is lost to the environment during its production, transmission from the North sea, processing, distribution to the consumer, and during combustion.

Mr. Moynihan: It is currently estimated that losses of natural gas during production, transmission from the North sea, processing and distribution to the customer amount to about 2 per cent. of production. No official estimates of losses during combustion are available.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Pass Holders

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the names of right hon. and hon. Members, together with the number of researchers and staff pass holders, and their names, accredited to them.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 25 November 1991]:* It has been the policy of my predecessors not to give the names of staff working for right hon. and hon. Members. However the latest pass office figures show that

(a) 165 hon. Members have one full researcher's pass;
(b) 2 hon. Members have two full researcher's passes;
(c) 12 hon. Members are on the waiting list;
(d) 4 Front Bench Members are on the waiting list for a full researcher's pass;
(e) 57 Members have places on the research assistants list which are currently not filled.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

INWARD Group

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much money his Department has given this year to INWARD and how much in each of the last 10 years; and which local authorities within the INWARD group have not supported INWARD;

(2) If he will make a statement on INWARD's achievements over the last 10 years.

Mr. Redwood: Since INWARD was established in 1985 my Department has provided grant in aid for its overseas inward investment activities, details of which are set out in the table.

DTI grants to INWARD since 1985

	DTI grant aid £000	*Total funding £000*	*Grant Percentage*
1985-86	187	407	46
1986-87	263	488	54
1987-88	380	620	61
1988-89	450	718	63
1989-90	541	918	59
1990-91	840	1,243	67
1991-92	990	1,566	63

In 1991-92, my Department will provide £990,000 grant in aid, representing an 83 per cent. increase over the last two years. This reflects the Government's continued commitment towards INWARD and acknowledges its valuable contribution to the overall success of the United Kingdom in attracting inward investment. According to information notified to my Department's Invest in Britain Bureau since INWARD's formation in 1985, 225 decisions have been made by foreign companies to invest in the region. At the time these decisions were announced they were expected to create or safeguard 36,000 jobs. INWARD's activities on behalf of the region have contributed to this recent level of success.

As to local authority support, I understand that 29 out of the 47 local authorities within INWARD's region are currently paid up members of INWARD. Those currently not in membership are Manchester, Salford, Bury, Thameside, Wigan, Stockport, Congleton, St. Helens, Sefton, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Fylde, Preston, Pendle, Allerdale, Barrow-in-Furness, Carlisle, Copeland and South Lakeland.

Furniture (Safety)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has made recently to the EC regarding regulations on the safety of furniture.

Mr. Leigh: The Commission decided to suspend further work on its draft directive on the fire behaviour of upholstered furniture in May last year pending further research into the burning behaviour of upholstery materials and into test methods. We made it clear to the Commission that the United Kingdom will retain its regulations until a regime consistent with the level of protection in the United Kingdom is available under the directive.

Officials from my Department and from the Home Office are participating in discussions with the Commission in drawing up proposals for research.

Breathing Apparatus

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce details of bodies to certify United Kingdom manufactured breathing apparatus in order for manufacturers to comply with the EC directive under article 100A.

Mr Leigh: Approved inspection bodies will be appointed once the implementing regulations are made. We hope to publish the regulations in draft for consultation in the near future.

Human Rights Records (Export)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration the Government pay to the human rights situation in a country prior to granting a licence for the export of equipment which is likely to be used for internal repression.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department receives expert advice from other Government Departments when considering whether to permit the export of virtually all military and paramilitary items in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991. This advice includes, where appropriate, consideration of the human rights record of the country of ultimate destination.

"199?" Poster Campaign

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the effects of the recent "199?" poster campaign advertising the DTI business hotline 181-200 1992.

Mr. Sainsbury: Whilst it is not possible to attribute calls to the hotline to the poster campaign there has been a significant increase in the number made. In the first three weeks of this year, there were nearly twice as many calls as in the same period last year—3,917 compared with 2,216.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *571*, if the commercial overseas services offered by the nuclear industry are eligible for export credit.

Mr. Sainsbury: Contracts for reprocessing spent fuel associated with the nuclear fuel industry can be considered in principle for export credit cover subject to satisfactory underwriting conditions.

Export Control Organisation

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which parts and groups of the Export of Goods (Control) Order were referred to in his answers on 26 April 1991, *Official Report*, column *595*, to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) and 21 October 1991, *Official Report*, column 312, to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* The answer on 26 April 1991 covered group 1 of part II of schedule 1 of the 1989 order (now superseded by the 1991 order).

The answer on 21 October dealt with all goods in schedule 1 of the 1989 order.

Iran

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what items are subject to an embargo on trade with Iran.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* Exports to Iran which require a licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991 are scrutinised rigorously in accordance with the policy notified to the House by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 29 October 1985 *(Official Report*, col. *450)*.

Instruments of Torture

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if he will make a statement outlining the procedures used by his Department in examining a country's human rights record before equipment can be exported to a country under the remit of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989.

Mr. Sainsbury: My Department receives expert advice from other Government Departments when considering whether to permit the export of virtually all military and paramilitary items in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991. This advice includes, where appropriate, consideration of the human rights record of the country of ultimate destination.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 27 January 1992

HOME DEPARTMENT

Newspapers (Complaints)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list those national newspapers by title and ownership which have now established systems of ombudsmen or readers' representatives to take up complaints and breaches of the code of practice to which they were committed under the terms of the joint declaration of November 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We understand that the newspapers that were party to the joint declaration of November 1989 and which currently have readers" representatives are as follows:

Daily Express	Express Newspapers plc
Daily Mail	Associated Newspapers plc
Daily Star	Express Newspapers plc
The Daily Telegraph	The Daily Telegraph plc
Evening Standard	Associated Newspapers plc
The Guardian	Guardian Newspapers Ltd
The Independent	Newspapers Publishing plc
The Mail on Sunday	Associated Newspapers plc
News of the World	News Group Newspapers Ltd
The Observer	The Observer Ltd
The Sun	News Group Newspapers Ltd
Sunday Express	Express Newspapers plc
The Sunday Times	Times Newspapers Ltd
The Sunday Telegraph	The Daily Telegraph plc
The Times	Times Newspapers Ltd
Today	News Corporation Ltd[1]

[1] Ultimate parent company

DNA Analysis

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any proposals for guidelines to govern the national and international use of DNA analysis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no immediate plans for guidance in this area. My right hon. Friend asked the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice to consider the use of DNA and we await its recommendations.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is made for the destruction of the DNA profiles of persons cleared of committing an offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Guidelines adopted by the Home Office and Metropolitan police forensic science services provide that DNA profiles of persons excluded from or acquitted of offences are removed from the central database and the sample from which the profile is taken is also destroyed.

Release of Prisoners (Ill Health)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prisoners released from prisons in England and Wales before the completion of their sentences on the ground of ill health in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The numbers of prisoners released from their sentences by the exercise of the royal prerogative on the ground of serious illness are as follows:—

Year	*Number*
1989	4
1990	1
1991	Nil

Prisoners may also be released from prison on parole provided they are considered suitable for release on licence. Any ill health will be taken into account when the case is being considered.

Private Prisons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what prison industries are proposed for privately run prisons; who will be responsible for obtaining contracts for such prison industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Proposals for work for prisoners are solicited from bidders as part of the invitation to tender for the management of a contracted out prison. It is for the successful bidder to implement his proposals.

Mr. Osama Ibrahim Al-Asfoor

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State proposes to answer the letter of the hon. Member for Basingstoke of 19 January, and subsequent letters and telephone calls, regarding Mr. Osama Ibrahim Al-Asfoor, c/o 258 Kempshott lane, Basingstoke.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have written to my hon. Friend.

TRANSPORT

Computer Hacks

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations have taken place into allegations that computer specialists have hacked into the driving licence records at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea; and with what result.

Mr. Chope: The DVLA has disscussed the recent allegations about unauthorised access to its computer records with the author of the original *Police Review* article who has confirmed that there is no substance to them. The author has agreed to retract the allegations in his next article.

King's Cross

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds are being made available to British Rail for design and other work in connection with planning and preparation of the King's Cross project.

Mr. Freeman: The external finance limit for BR next year will be £2,041 million. This will allow BR to spend £66 million on design and preparatory work for the King's Cross, Thameslink 2000 and channel tunnel rail link projects.

Train Doors

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, if he will make an early statement on the subject of the reliability of slam-shut doors on British Rail; and if he will ensure that adequate care is given to British Rail passengers.

Mr. Freeman: Both the Government and British Rail attach the highest priority to railway safety. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will give very careful consideration to the report of the Health and Safety Executive's investigation into the pattern of falls from train doors when it is completed in the spring, and respond appropriately at that time.

Road Schemes

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *503*, on the environmental assessment of road schemes, how he proposes to judge whether the environmental impact of a road scheme is significant to the extent that it is within the terms of the EC directive.

Mr. Chope: An environmental impact assessment is required for all projects listed in annex I of directive 85/337/EEC. The environmental appraisal, which is standard departmental practice for all schemes in the national roads programme, reveals the extent to which the impact of annex II projects is significant within the requirements of the directive.

A34

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the side road orders required before work can start on the remaining section of the A34 in Hampshire and the Newbury bypass to be completed; and whether he will make a statement on progress on the A34 improvements.

Mr. Chope: Supplementary side road orders and a compulsory purchase order for the Newbury bypass were published in draft last October. In the light of objections received, it has been decided that a public inquiry should be held. Details of the arrangements for the inquiry will be issued as soon as possible. Further progress will depend on completion of the statutory procedures.

Leicester Bypasses

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's estimates of traffic flows on the proposed eastern bypass, Leicester; and how many vehicles use the western bypass each day.

Mr. Chope: Traffic information from consultants for Leicester eastern bypass is not yet available. Construction of Leicester western bypass is due to begin later this year. Estimated flows for the first year of operation—1994—range from 22,000 to 41,000.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the cost to the taxpayer of appointing consultants to plan the eastern bypass, Leicester.

Mr. Chope: Fees are a commercially confidential matter between the Department as client and the consultant as provider of a service.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the date when the Severn bridge will be free of lane restrictions and have four lanes open to traffic.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* Four lanes are available to traffic now at peak time, but work following the completion of the resurfacing, such as the erection of central reserve safety fencing, will be in evidence until about the middle of this year.

Airbags

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is his Department's current policy on the use of airbags as an additional safety measure for motorcycles;

(2) what research his Department has undertaken on the accidental inflation of airbags on motorcycles.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The Government are currently funding a research programme at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory in which motor-cycles are tested with and without airbags. The research is in its early stages, and it is not yet clear whether airbags will prove a practical safety measure.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research his Department has undertaken on the potential health hazards from gas contained in airbags used as safety devices on motor vehicles.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* A study is looking at the use of airbags in motor vehicles, including any potential health hazards from the gas discharged from airbags.

East Midlands Regional Office

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the grade of the director of network management and construction of the East Midlands regional office.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* Grade 5.

Itchen Valley Watermeadows SSSI

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what steps he has taken to ensure that the contractors do not carry out potentially damaging operations on the River Itchen watermeadows site of special scientific interest in breach of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981;

(2) if he has received the consent of English Nature for potentially damaging operations, as defined by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, on the River Itchen watermeadows site of special scientific interest;

(3) if the advance bridge works being carried out on the M3 Bar End-Compton will involve potentially damaging operations as defined by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on the River Itchen watermeadows site of special scientific interest prior to 1 March.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* The potential impact upon the Itchen Valley watermeadows site of special scientific interest of the construction of the M3 between Bar End and Compton was fully considered at the public inquiry into the scheme and the inspector's report thereon. The inspector concluded that the scheme should proceed notwithstanding the impact upon some 3·5 hectares—less than 2 per cent. of the 175-hectare site of special scientific interest. Under the requirements of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Department does not need to obtain any further consent from English Nature, but is required to give four months notice before carrying out any works within the site of special scientific interest. No works will be carried out in the site of special scientific interest until the notice has expired.

DVLA

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the security of the DVLA computer from unauthorised access or interference.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* The DVLA is alert to the sensitivity and value of the data held on its computer system and has protected them accordingly. This has involved measures to combat unauthorised access, including the use of internal and external scrutineers. The security measures are a combination of physical restriction and procedural control.

Motorway Service Areas

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the expected location and date of operation of new motorway service areas on the M25 and M40 motorways.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* Motorway service areas—MSAs—are currently under development for the M25 at Clacket Lane—junctions 5 to 6—and for the M40 at Ardley—junction 10. Both are expected to open by the autumn of next year. As intimated in the citizens charter, the Government are considering a new system with the aim of ensuring that more MSAs are provided more quickly.

THE ARTS

Disabled People (Access to Buildings)

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will make it a condition for public funding that arts venues are fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Mr. Renton: The responsibility for the allocation of Government funding to individual arts organisations rests with the Arts Council of Great Britain. Its funding criteria include requirements on access, including access to artistic and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The council's appraisals of the performance of individual clients pay particular attention to this.

The Arts Council published in 1990 an action plan on the arts and disability, a follow-on from the code of practice published in 1985. These documents have been sent to all the council's client bodies and other interested parties.

The Arts Council is committed to ensuring that improvements are made to increase the accessibility of arts venues to people with sight impairments, hearing impairments, mobility difficulties and all other forms of disability. However, the council does not consider that it would be in the best interests to make complete accessibility a mandatory condition of grant, as grants are normally paid to performing companies, many of which do not own the buildings in which they appear.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Duchy Visit

34. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next plans to visit the duchy; and if he will make a statement.

37. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next expects to visit the duchy.

38. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he next plans to pay an official visit to the duchy.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) earlier today.

Official Duties

35. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he has any plans to increase the amount of time spent on official duties.

Mr. Chris Patten: No.

Official Car

36. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what arrangements are made for the reimbursement of public funds for any use of his official car for non-official purposes.

Mr. Chris Patten: I use my ministerial car only when undertaking duties as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and in my capacity as a Government Minister.

ENVIRONMENT

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will increase capital investment in home energy efficiency.

Mr. Yeo: The Government make substantial capital sums available for home energy efficiency. Provisional figures indicate local authorities spent over £120 million on insulation works, and some £110 million on other energy conservation measures, on the council house stock in 1990-91. They are spending an extra £60 million on energy efficiency over three years under the green house programme. An additional £24 million has been made available for spending on public and private sector insulation under the home energy efficiency scheme in 1991-92. Further smaller sums are spent on these measures through house renovation grants and the Housing Corporation. We have also recently launched a major publicity campaign called "Helping the Earth Begins At

Home", to encourage householders to adopt energy efficiency measures in response to global warming. The campaign emphasises that many measures have short payback periods and are therefore cost-effective for householders to finance themselves.

Urban Programme

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how much money Sheffield's urban programme budget has lost, in 1990-91 and 1991-92, as a result of the Government's policy not to implement full additionality; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much money urban programme local authorities have lost in 1990-91 and 1991-92 as a result of the Government's policy not to implement full additionality; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Expected European Community receipts are taken into account annually in setting national public expenditure programmes which are therefore larger than they would otherwise be. Consequently, ERDF grants must be covered from within the public expenditure provision.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list the new forms of optional alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and provide a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each agency;

(2) how many staff were in post in each of his Department's executive agencies on the date on which it was established; and how many are now in post;

(3) if he will list each of his Department's executive agencies that operates on a group bonus scheme; what cash amount per person was awarded in the last year for which figures are available; and what conditions were attached to its award.

Mr. Heseltine: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave on Monday 13 January 1992 at columns 420-21.

Water Pollution

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to assure himself that the chlorine levels present in drinking water are sufficient to prevent infection in consumers from oocysts of Cryptosporidium.

Mr. Baldry: In July 1990, the group of experts on cryptosporidium in water supplies, chaired by Sir John Badenoch, reported that water treatment processes in current use were not designed to deal specifically with the problem of cryptosporidial oocysts which are also unaffected by chlorine in the concentrations that can be used. Although treatment processes cannot be relied upon to prevent all oocysts from entering mains water, they are quite effective in dealing with low numbers of the parasite.

The Government accepted all the recommendations of the expert group designed to minimise infection. They also initiated the research programme proposed by the group.

Copies of the report were placed in the House Library at the time of publication.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to require British Coal to obtain consent to discharge ferric iron from abandoned coal mines to surface waters.

Mr. Baldry: The National Rivers Authority has been reviewing the extent of problems from abandoned mine workings in England and Wales, and we are considering how best they might be tackled.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements exist to report and collate information from the littoral states relating to the surfacing of dumped chemical weapons in the North sea and surrounding areas; and how many reports of such incidents have been received by his Department in the last 12 months.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom is party, with all other north sea littoral states, to an international agreement designed to facilitate co-operation in dealing with major oil or chemical pollution incidents in the North sea. Known as the Bonn agreement, it requires contracting states to report any pollution incident to other members which may be affected by subsequent pollution. The agreement also provides for each member to use its best endeavour to provide counter-pollution assistance if requested by another contracting party.

The Department of Transport's marine pollution control unit exercises the Government's responsibility in this area. It has received no reports of the surfacing of dumped chemical weapons in the last 12 months.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department holds on the quality of water in marinas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The National Rivers Authority is responsible for monitoring the quality of coastal waters, as defined under section 104 of the 1991 Water Resources Act, including marinas. The monitoring data is publicly available on the registers maintained in the regional offices of the NRA.

Privatisations

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for the five years prior to privatisation the loss or profit of the water industry; and if he will list any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Baldry: Full financial details for each of the former water authorities covering the five years prior to privatisation were included in the accountants' report chapter of each company's section of the prospectus for the sale of the water holding companies, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Waste Shipments

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce further controls on the regulations of trans-frontier shipments of waste.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom is pressing for agreement in the European Community on a regulation

which will strengthen existing controls. The regulation will enable member states to ratify the UNEP Basel convention on the trans-boundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal.

Car Paint Spraying

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the environmental and health effects of effluent resulting from industrial-scale car paint spraying waste; what regulations govern the operation of such plants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The pollution most likely to result from industrial-scale car paint spraying is to air, the main pollutants being volatile organic compounds. Volatile organic compounds contribute to the formation of ground level ozone and photochemical smog, and can cause a local smell problem; certain volatile organic compounds are toxic or carcinogenic. From 1 April this year, paint application in vehicle manufacturing where five tonnes or more of organic solvent is used per year will require authorisation under the local authority air pollution control system set up by part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Liquid effluents arising from industrial-scale car paint spraying are also subject to control. Discharges of effluent to sewer require the consent of the relevant water company; discharges to a watercourse require the consent of the National Rivers Authority. Where the application of paint in a manufacturing process is likely to produce 1,000 tonnes or more of special waste a year, the process will be subject to integrated pollution control which is enforced centrally by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

MINIS Report

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the next MINIS report to be published; if he will make it his policy to place a copy in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The next MINIS reports, MINIS 13, will be published after the end of the round of reviews and meetings now starting in my Department. I expect them to be available in June. It was from the start, and remains, my policy to place a copy of the MINIS returns in the Library of the House.

New Estates (Crime Prevention)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward legislation to make it obligatory for local authorities and private developers to liaise with the police crime prevention officers at the initial stages of the development of housing and industrial estates.

Mr. Yeo: The Town and Country Planning (Development Plan) Regulations, which come into force on 10 February, will require local planning authorities to have regard to crime prevention when preparing development plans. Furthermore, my Department's circulars 1/84 (issued jointly with the Home Office) and 22/88, provide guidance on the role of planning in crime prevention. They encourage local planning authorities to consult police architectural liaison officers on planning applications for developments, such as housing and industrial estates, where there is potential to eliminate or reduce criminal activity through the adoption of best practice at the design stage.

Bats

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue a development control policy note for the guidance of local planning authorities in relation to applications in which an issue arises from the presence of bats on an application site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales today.

Development Corporations

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total amount of money made available to each development corporation in England for each year of operation up to December 1991.

Mr. Key: This is tabulated as follows:

Grant in aid to UDCs

£ million

UDC	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*
London Docklands	30·183	40·587	62·954	58·639	53·616
Merseyside	6·107	20·676	31·870	29·723	28·325

UDC	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
London Docklands	64·881	82·800	116·415	255·750	332·975	248·710
Merseyside	27·604	20·942	20·535	23·000	24·000	28·084
Black Country	—	2·443	23·000	38·000	32·000	36·350
Teesside	—	5·000	20·697	36·009	42·135	53·100
Trafford Park	0·031	10·450	15·500	13·300	24·200	28·100
Tyne and Wear	—	4·000	24·016	35·800	37·750	37·500
Bristol	—	—	0·283	5·000	13·425	27·125
Central Manchester	—	—	2·500	11·000	14·000	16·000
Leeds	—	—	2·743	8·750	14·000	12·600
Sheffield	—	—	7·958	9·500	18·967	13·300

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many jobs have been created in each development corporation in England in each year of its operation.

Mr. Key: The totals for permanent jobs created in UDC areas to March 1991, net of losses, are as follows. Individual figures for each year are not available on a consistent basis for all the corporations.

	Numbers
London Docklands	26,000
Merseyside	4,626
Black Country	2,600
Teesside	4,650
Trafford Park	2,557
Tyne and Wear	3,169
Bristol	4,000
Central Manchester	950
Leeds	5,862
Sheffield	7,580
Total	61,994

London Boroughs (Statutory Duties)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will examine the scope for additional Departmental assistance to outer London boroughs incurring unavoidable additional expenditure outlays from extra statutory burdens since 1987-88.

Mr. Key: We are satisfied that standard spending assessments take proper account of all statutory burdens falling on each class of authority.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are currently employed by the Property Services Agency; and if he will give a breakdown of the number of employees in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the English regions and overseas, respectively.

Mr. Yeo: As at 31 December 1991, PSA Services employed a total of 17,581 staff in the following locations:

	Number
Scotland	1,542
Wales	799
Northern Ireland	393
English regions[1]	11,538
Overseas	3,309
Total	17,581

[1] (including all staff in London and Croydon).

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what changes he has made in the Property Services Agency to prepare it for privatisation; and if he will make a statement on the Government's plans for this sale.

Mr. Yeo: PSA Services was restructured in 1990 into two main businesses, PSA Projects and PSA Building Management, which now consists of five regional businesses. A contractor manager was appointed for BM in November 1991. Improved management and accounting systems are being installed and commercial contracts with client Departments are being negotiated. Action has been taken to reduce costs. A major staff rundown is in hand, as far as possible by voluntary means, though compulsory redundancies cannot be ruled out. I intend to offer PSA Projects for sale early this year; I am currently considering the timing and the form in which it should be offered for sale. I expect to offer the five BM businesses for sale in the second half of 1992-93 on the basis of the implementation plan currently being developed.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people were employed by the Property Services Agency on 1 April 1991; and what were the corresponding numbers in 1990, 1989, 1988 and 1987.

Mr. Yeo: PSA Services employed a total of 19,571 people on 1 April 1991. Corresponding totals for previous years are:

Year	*Number*
1 April 1990	23,441
1 April 1989	26,046
1 April 1988	28,420
1 April 1987	29,311

Public Access to Information

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to publish the consultation paper on the implementation of the EC directive on public access to information.

Mr. Trippier: I have today issued the consultation paper setting out the Government's proposals on implementing this directive (EC 90/313).

The United Kingdom Government took a leading part in the negotiation of the EC directive which was agreed by the Environment Council of ministers in 1990. This directive must be implemented by member states by the end of 1992.

Improving the public's access to environmental information was one of the key principles set out in the Environment White Paper "This Common Inheritance". Better access to environmental information will help to raise the standard of public debate on environmental issues by clarifying the facts.

We have already taken steps towards the implementation of the directive through the establishment of public registers of decisions taken by the enforcement authorities such as those held by the National Rivers Authority and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The directive extends the public's right of access to information held by public authorities beyond that already held on registers.

The consultation paper sets out the Government's proposals on implementation. In particular it covers the following issues:

the kinds of information covered by the Directive;

a guideline list of the public authorities subject to the Directive;

the exemptions provided for in the Directive; and

legislation proposals.

Views are invited on these proposals by 30 April 1992.

Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money his Department has spent on producing its citizens charter proposals, arising from production, distribution and publicity costs.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* I issued on 24 January a council tenants charter. Production, initial distribution and publicity costs are estimated at £291,550. Further distribution costs will be incurred in response to demand.

Local Government Finance

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average number of liability orders for arrears of community charge processed per hour in the magistrates courts.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

For each hour which magistrates courts in England and Wales specifically set aside for community charge enforcement proceedings, an average of 243 liability orders are issued.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average cost per hour to public funds of magistrates courts hearings to grant liability orders for recovery of community charge.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

The average cost per sitting hour in magistrates courts is £217.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of mortgages repossession actions begun in each county court for 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: The total number of mortgage repossession actions entered, suspended orders and orders made during 1990 and 1991 in each county court in England and Wales is contained in two lists which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. These figures do not indicate how many houses have been repossessed through the courts as not all of the orders made will have resulted in the issue and execution of warrants of possession.

Bankruptcy

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of bankruptcy cases begun in each county court for 1990 and 1991.

The Attorney-General: The total number of creditors' petitions, debtors' petitions and company winding-up petitions issued during 1990 and 1991 in each county court in England and Wales having insolvency jurisdiction is contained in two lists which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Forensic Scientists

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General if he will take measures to ensure that independent forensic scientists receive legal aid payments due to them without delay.

The Attorney-General: It is the responsibility of the solicitor who commissions a report from an expert, such as an independent forensic scientist, to pay for the report. In a legally aided case, the solicitor may then claim reimbursement of the cost of the expert's report, in accordance with legal aid regulations.

Experts' Fees

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General when he intends to introduce the scheme for interim payment of experts' fees from legal aid funds.

The Attorney-General: In a legally aided civil case, a solicitor may claim a payment on account for disbursements, including experts' fees. The Lord Chancellor had hoped to introduce a similar scheme last year for the payment of Crown court legal aid bills, but the proposals he put forward for the scale and operation of such a scheme were not acceptable to the Law Society.

The Lord Chancellor is now reconsidering his proposals, and hopes to continue consultation with the Law Society and be in a position to introduce a scheme later this year.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Attorney-General what sums have been recovered by administrators or receivers in each of the past four years as a result of investigations by the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: The purpose of investigations by the Serious Fraud Office is to establish whether or not criminal offences have been committed.

The Serious Fraud Office does co-operate with administrators and receivers, but insofar as funds are recovered by the latter, such information is not routinely reported to the Serious Fraud Office. It would in any event be impossible to specify the property recovered as the result of investigations by the Serious Fraud Office.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the development of practical co-operation between the Serious Fraud Office and authorities in *(a)* Switzerland and *(b)* Liechtenstein.

The Attorney General: The passing of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990 enabled the United Kingdom to ratify the European convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters. The Convention has been ratified by both Switzerland and Liechtenstein and thus in addition to bilateral assistance on a reciprocal basis the scope for co-operation has been enlarged.

The director of the Serious Fraud Office is satisfied that effective channels of communication have been estalished to enable full advantage of these arrangements to be taken.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

European Standing Committees

44. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement on the first report of Session 1991-92 from the Select Committee on Procedure "Review of European Standing Committees".

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the Procedure Committee for its thorough review of the first Session's

experience of the new European Standing Committees. The Government are considering their recommendations carefully and will respond soon.

Kiosk

46. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what were the takings of the House of Commons kiosk *(a)* for the month of December 1991 and *(b)* for the year to 31 December 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The takings at the souvenir kiosk in the House for December last were £191,426; the equivalent figure for souvenirs and other goods sold from the kiosk in Bellamy's was £28,425. In the 12 months to 31 December 1991 the takings for the souvenir kiosk in the House were £691,571; the takings for Bellamy's kiosk for the three months since it opened on 1 October 1991 were £42,573. All figures include VAT.

Car Parking

47. **Mr. Andrew Hargreaves:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* Members and *(b)* the press.

Mr. MacGregor: A summary of car parking spaces available is given in annex A of the leaflet "Car Parking" obtainable from the Serjeant at Arms. I am arranging for a copy to be sent to my hon. Friend.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Beith: To ask the Lord President of the Council when debates on statutory instruments were last adjourned under *(a)* Standing Order No. 14 (1)(b) and *(b)* Standing Order No. 15 (2).

Mr. MacGregor: The last occasion on which a debate on a motion to approve a statutory instrument was adjourned because the time for debate was not considered adequate by the Chair was Wednesday 16 February 1983.

The last occasion on which a debate on a motion to address the Queen for the annulment of a statutory instrument was adjourned because the time for debate was not considered adequate by the Chair was 9 February 1976.

Pedestrian Underpass

Sir David Steel: To ask the Lord President of the Council what estimate he has made of the cost and time of construction of a pedestrian underpass from the foot of the existing steps outside No. 1 Parliament street to the other side of Bridge street.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand that during the design stage for phase I of the new parliamentary building a number of options for a subway were considered but they proved either impractical or expensive. The particular location mentioned by the right hon. Member was considered, but there is insufficient space between the road surface and the roof of the District and Circle Line.

The design proposals for the next phase of the new building do envisage, however, that the existing subway will be dedicated to the use of the two Houses and that there should be a direct link through the new building to No. 1 Parliament street.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Exit Visas

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Russian authorities about their failure to grant an exit visa to Yakov Fukson, of St. Petersburg.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We can certainly raise the case of refusenik Yakov Fukson of St. Petersburg with the Russian authorities, but in order to make our representations most effective, we shall need further details.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Russian authorities about their failure to grant an exit visa to Vadim Shlyaliter, of Yekaterinburg.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We can certainly raise the case of refusenik Vadim Shlyaliter of Yekaterinburg with the Russian authorities, but in order to make our representations most effective, we shall need further details.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Russian authorities about their failure to grant an exit visa to Simon Eppel, of Angarsk.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We can certainly raise the case of refusenik Simon Eppel of Angarsk with the Russian authorities, but in order to make our representations most effective we shall need further details.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his statement, *Official Report*, 14 January, column 901, if he will outline the circumstances in which the threat of the use of a strategic weapon would not be credible whereas the threat of a sub-strategic weapon might be credible.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to comment on the circumstances in which nuclear weapons might be used. Deterrence is best served by ensuring uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the nature of our response.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's policy towards the complete removal of all tactical and sub-strategic nuclear weapons from Russia, all of the other former Soviet republics and from NATO countries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We strongly endorsed United States and Soviet undertakings last autumn to eliminate all their ground-launched sub-strategic nuclear weapons, and have subsequently welcomed the Commonwealth of Independent States stated intention to honour that commitment.

Ukraine

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards the retention of nuclear weapons by the Ukraine.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Commonwealth of Independent States has agreed that nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory will remain under unified control until they have been dismantled by the end of 1994. The Foreign Secretary, during his recent visit to Kiev, welcomed this as well as Ukraine's intention to accede to the non-proliferation treaty as soon as it is in a position to abide by the treaty's obligations.

Jonathan Moyle

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications Her Majesty's Government have had with the Chilean Government over the death of Jonathan Moyle

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A senior Foreign and Commonwealth Office official discussed the case with the Chilean Foreign Minister in November 1991. He expressed Her Majesty's Government's concern that those responsible for Mr. Moyle's death should be brought to justice.

Our embassy at Santiago maintains regular contact with the Chilean authorities and continues to monitor the case closely.

Dubai

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek the agreement of the Government of the United Arab Emirates to disclose details of all discussions he has held with it about the export of materials from Britain to the special branch of Dubai.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have had no such discussions.

India

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning human rights abuses by Indian state forces in the Punjab; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received many representations about human rights abuses in Punjab, where the authorities are facing a campaign of murder and terrorism by Sikh separatists. The Indian Government are fully aware of our concerns.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the numbers of people in the Punjab *(a)* killed, *(b)* arrested, *(c)* missing feared killed or imprisoned and *(d)* tortured by Indian security forces since 1984; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: According to the latest Indian figures, it is estimated that approximately 12,000 people have been killed in Punjab since 1984. The other particulars requested are not available.

Maastricht Agreement

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *101*, if he will make his policy to make available the revised text of the Maastricht agreement, as prepared for signatures, at least seven days before the treaty is signed.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The text of the treaty on European union agreed at Maastricht was made available to the House on 16 December. It is now being prepared in a form suitable for signature on 7 February. This process will be completed only shortly before 7 February. I will ensure that a copy of the text is made available to the House immediately after signature.

Western European Union

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in discussions within the Council of the Western European Union over the United Kingdom's obligations under article VI of protocol No. II to the modified Brussels treaty of 1954; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In accordance with the procedure set out in article VI of protocol II of the modified Brussels treaty, on 11 July 1991 the Permanent Council of Western European Union considered the changes in the levels of United Kingdom forces stationed in Germany proposed in "Options for Change". In the light of the views of the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and the decisions of the NATO Defence Planning Committee, the council noted the planned reductions.

PRIME MINISTER

UN Security Council

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to his oral reply to the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), *Official Report*, 14 January 1992, column 807, he will set out the policies he plans to propose to the special summit of the permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations on *(a)* improving good government, *(b)* improving human rights and *(c)* disarmament and non-proliferation; and whether he has consulted any non-governmental organisations or specialist independent institutions to help develop such proposals.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* I shall make clear at the meeting of the Security Council on 31 January the importance that the Government attach to good government, human rights, arms control and non-proliferation in the maintenance of international peace and security. Our policies on these matters are well known and benefit from our valuable dialogue with a range of non-governmental organisations.

World Commission on Environment and Development

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer on 15 January, *Official Report*, column *579*, if he will set out *(a)* the amount of financial support and *(b)* the types of other support, Her Majesty's Government plans to give organisers of the reconvention of the World Commission on Environment and Development in London in April.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The Department of the Environment is contributing £30,000 to the costs of the London meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development in April. In addition the Government will be hosting engagements for the commissioners.

UN Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *579*, if he will give the names of the organisations to which reports of the preparatory committee meetings of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development have been distributed and the cost of this distribution to date.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The United Kingdom for United Nations Environment Programme has circulated reports on UNCED preparatory committee meetings to nearly 2000 organisations, under its contract with the Department of the Environment to keep the non-governmental community informed on preparations for UNCED.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bolivia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the previous land use of areas now planted with soya beans under the World bank's lowlands programme in Bolivia.

Mrs. Chalker: Up to 20 or 25 years ago the land was largely unsettled and forested. The agricultural uses to which the land was put after settlement and clearance were based on short-term returns, with little consideration for sustainability of the environment. Decline in fertility and weed growth encouraged further expansion of the cleared area.

The eastern lowlands project is intended to support agricultural production, including soya beans, by technologies which are both economically attractive and environmentally sound. The intention is to reduce the pressure for further clearance of forest areas.

Humanitarian Aid

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make additional donations to the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organisation for the United Nations inter-agency humanitarian programme for Kuwait, Iraq and the Iraq-Iran-Turkey Kurdish area.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* Yes. I have called for an early high-level meeting of donors, with the United Nations, to ensure that international humanitarian aid to the Gulf continues to be effectively co-ordinated.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Secondary Teachers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he received a copy of the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association report, "The Workload of Secondary Teachers", a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend is grateful to the Assistant Masters and Mistresses Association for sending him a copy of this report. It points clearly to the need for schools to look carefully at the way they use their teachers' time, and at the optimum balance of teaching and non-teaching duties for individual members of staff.

School Transport

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 20 January to the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East, *Official Report*, columns *36-37*, what information is available to enable accurate comparisons of expenditure rates on school transport by local education authorities.

Mr. Fallon: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) on 13 December, *Official Report*, column *559*. It set out each local education authority's expenditure on home to school transport in 1989-90 expressed as a percentage of its total net recurrent expenditure on education. No other information is available centrally.

Premature Babies

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what funds the Government presently make available for research into vitamin B12 deficiency among premature babies;

(2) if he will list those hospitals and research establishments presently carrying out research into vitamin B12 deficiency among premature babies.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The main government agency for supporting medical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its grant-in-aid from this Department. That grant totals £202 million in the current financial year. The MRC is an independent body, and normally decides its research priorities on its own expert judgment. The MRC Dunn nutrition unit, one of the world's leading institutes of nutritional research, while not doing any specific work on vitamin B12 deficiency in premature babies, does have research projects on the early response to diet in premature infants and on the impact of early nutrition on long term outcome. The MRC is always ready to consider, in competition with other applications, soundly based research proposals in this field.

Information is not collected centrally on relevant publicly funded research which may be undertaken by university departments, the health authorities and the health departments, nor on research undertaken by the medical research charities whose role we of course welcome.

School Toilets

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to update the 1977 survey conducted by his Department and the Welsh Office giving information on the number of schools with outside toilets.

Mr. Fallon: We have no plans to do so and neither has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Physical Education

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish a draft order setting out the requirements for physical education in the national curriculum.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today, along with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, published the draft order for physical education in the national curriculum. Copies have been sent to a wide range of interested individuals and organisations for submission of comments by 4 March at the latest.

Football

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent contact he has had with the Football Association to discuss the financing and other matters affecting the future of football.

Mr. Atkins: I wrote to the chief executive of the Football Association on 12 December requesting clarification of the funds likely to be generated by FA driven initiatives following the establishment of the Premier League and its split between the Premier League and Football League clubs for the purposes of implementing the Taylor report. I also raised with the FA a number of other issues which have implications for the running of the Premier League.

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives of the Football League, the Professional Footballers Association and the Premier League; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Atkins: I met the chief executive of the Football League on 5 December and the chief executive of the Professional Footballers Association on 31 October and at the Pools Promoters Association lunch on 3 December. So far as the Premier League is concerned, I met Mr. Rick Parry on 11 December and Sir John Quinton on 18 December. The Premier League and its implications for football were discussed. In the light of these meetings I wrote to the FA on 12 December to seek clarification of a number of issues.

Students

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what recent representations he has received concerning students' financial circumstances; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will obtain copies of the citizens advice bureaux report and the Edinburgh Students Association report, concerning the financial circumstances of students, for his departmental library.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations, including copies of the reports "Diminishing Options" and "Income Survey June '91" by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Edinburgh University Students Association respectively.

We have substantially increased support for students through the mandatory grant and student loan, and we have introduced the access funds for institutions to use at their discretion to help students who may face particular difficulties. My Department has given written evidence to the inquiry currently being undertaken by the Education, Science and Arts Committee and I will give oral evidence on 29 January 1992.

Stratford School, Newham

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent interventions or involvement his Department has made or had at Stratford school in Newham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has been in correspondence with the school on a number of matters recently, including the purported suspension of the head teacher in early January. On 10 January, the governing body was informed that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State was exercising his power to appoint two additional governors to the school with effect from 27 January. He has now appointed Mrs. Daphne Gould and Mr. Eric Bolton.

ENERGY

Coal Industry

10. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next plans to meet the chairman of the British Coal Corporation to discuss the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Industrial Fuel Prices

14. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much industrial fuel prices rose in real terms *(a)* between 1974 and 1979 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Moynihan: Between 1974 and 1979 industrial fuel prices rose by 16 per cent. in real terms. Since 1979 they have fallen by 35 per cent.

Fuel and Lighting

15. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the level of household spending on fuel and light as a percentage of total spending.

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990 household spending on fuel, light and power was 4·5 per cent. of total spending. This was a lower proportion that at any time since records began in 1957.

Non-fossil Fuel

17. **Mr. Thurham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had concerning non-fossil fuel generation in the north-west; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: I discussed the non-fossil fuel obligation and renewables-based generation of electricity with the chairman of the North Western electricity board in July 1991.

In 1989, a report was published on a study of the prospects for renewable energy in the north-west. This

study was jointly funded by NORWEB and my Department, and carried-out by staff from the company and from the energy technology support unit.

A further joint study is now in progress, on implementation and the refining of cost estimates.

British Coal Enterprise Scheme

18. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the number of jobs created by the British Coal Enterprise scheme in each of the past three years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The number of job opportunities created by British Coal Enterprise in each of the past three years are: 1988-89, 14,593; 1989-90, 14,784; and, 1990-91, 9,268—nearly 40,000 in total.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

19. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the level of carbon dioxide emissions that are saved in the United Kingdom every year by the use of nuclear power.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply which I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre (Mr. Mans) earlier today.

Coventry Colliery

20. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what action his Department has taken as a result of the meeting between the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), on the circumstances of the closure of Coventry colliery.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Following this meeting, I conveyed the concerns of the hon. Member for Conventry South-East, and his deputation, to British Coal Enterprise. I encouraged it to continue its excellent retraining and job shop projects for those affected by the rundown of operations at Coventry colliery.

Nuclear Electric

21. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of output achieved by Nuclear Electric in 1990-91.

Mr. Wakeham: In 1990-91 Nuclear Electric achieved a record output of just over 45 TWh from its portfolio of stations.

23. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what change there has been in the past year in the output of Nuclear Electric in its costs and in its operating profits.

Mr. Wakeham: The year 1990-91 saw record output of just over 45 TWh from Nuclear Electric's stations compared to 42·5 TWh the previous year. Operating profit before exceptional items rose from £227 million in 1989-90 to £326 million in 1990-91. Operating costs per unit sold in real terms fell from 4·7 in 1989-90 to 4 in 1990-91.

Energy-intensity Ratio

22. **Mr. Rost:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much the United Kingdom's energy-intensity ratio has changed since 1983; and what is the corresponding figure for the rest of the EC and with Japan.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) earlier today.

Energy Industry Employees

24. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the number of people directly employed in the United Kingdom in *(a)* the nuclear industry, *(b)* the opencast coal sector and *(c)* the offshore oil and gas industry.

Mr. Wakeham: Latest available estimates of numbers of people directly employed are: some 40,000 in the United Kingdom's nuclear energy industry as at 31 March 1991; some 8,500 in the United Kingdom's opencast coal sector in 1991; and some 36,500 in the offshore oil and gas industry in 1990.

Scottish Coal Industry

25. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet representatives of the Scottish NUM to discuss the future of the Scottish coal industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I have no immediate plans to meet representatives of the Scottish NUM to discus the future of the Scottish coal industry.

Sizewell B

26. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the level of investment to date in the sizewell B nuclear power station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: By September 1991, when my Department received the most recent six-monthly progress report from Nuclear Electric, £1,614·2 million had been committed in respect of the Sizewell B project of which £1,224·3 million had been spent, in April 1987 prices. I am delighted to say that the project remains well ahead of time and within budget.

Offshore Industry

27. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with this ministerial colleagues representing the other member states of the European Community relating to matters of regulation of offshore extractive industries.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend meets his ministerial colleagues from other EC member states regularly to discuss a wide range of energy issues.

Mersey Barrage Company

28. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he plans to hold discussions with the Mersey Barrage Company about the future prospects for the development of renewable energy as a result of its proposals.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend and I expect to meet the Mersey Barrage Company during the curent studies.

Gas Prices

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the cost of gas to the average domestic household in the United Kingdom in 1987 at current prices; what it is now; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: In 1987 the annual cost of gas to an average household was £268. The cost now is £327, which represents a decrease in real terms of 8 per cent.

Opencast Mines

Mr. Jack Thompson To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will list the opencast coal sites currently awaiting planning permission in the county of Northumberland;

(2) if he will list the opencast coal sites currently in operation in Northumberland; and if he will give their projected completion dates.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Such records are not held centrally. The local mineral planning authority should be able to provide this information.

Meter Reading

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions the gas and electricity distribution companies have used their statutory right of entry to premises to read meters in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a matter for the companies concerned.

Miners' Redundancy Payments

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many miners received redundancy payments under the restructuring fund in 1990-91; how many received redundancy payments of between £0 and £10,000, £10,000 and £15,000, £15,000 and £20,000, £20,000 and £25,000, £25,000 and £30,000, £30,000 and £35,000 and in excess of £35,000; and what are the equivalent figures for the first three quarters of 1991-92.

Mr. Wakeham: Detailed information concerning mineworkers accepting redundancy is a matter for the British Coal Corporation. In 1990-91 total restructuring grant paid by my Department to the corporation was £225·9 million. This included payments in respect of redundancies. The equivalent figure for the first three quarters of 1991-92 was £183·6 million.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all regions where funding under the home energy efficiency scheme for work carried out by *(a)* contractors and *(b)* network installers has become exhausted, giving for each region the date of exhaustion.

Mr. Wakeham: The home energy efficiency scheme is a national scheme and funding is not allocated on a regional basis.

Network installers are given indications of the funding available to them at the start of the financial year and quarterly allocations thereafter.

The phasing of work within a quarter is a matter for each network installer. On average, network installers are not fully utilising their allocations. To help those individual network installers who are doing so and appear resource constrained, the Energy Action Grants Agency will shortly be redistributing available money by means of a suppplementary allocation.

Funding for direct applications where work would be done by contractors or on a DIY basis was fully allocated in September. However, there is no question of funding for the scheme as a whole being exhausted.

Chapelcross

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current level of Wigner energy in the four reactor vessels at Chapelcross; what is the maximum recommended level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* This is an operational matter for British Nuclear Fuels plc as licensed operators of the Chapelcross site. The situation there is of course routinely monitored and regularly reviewed by BNF, and also by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any area of the Chapelcross Magnox reactor's pressure vessels operate in an embrittled state during normal operation, start up or closing down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* I understand that the design of the steel reactor pressure vessels at British Nuclear Fuels plc's Magnox nuclear power station at Chapelcross is such that they have not been irradiated to the same extent as reactor pressure vessels at other Magnox stations. The Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate (NII) approves the rules governing the operating conditions of all Magnox reactor pressure vessels, including those at Chapelcross, and ensures that there are adequate safety margins during all phases of operation. Nevertheless, the NII has asked BNFL to review their safety case for the continued operation of Chapelcross power station. This safety case is currently under consideration by the NII.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Maples: My department has made the following use of the Coopers and Lybrand group:

1989-90

Rental of a manual on synthetic Work Measurement data. There were also three secondments: one to CCTA Systems Consultancy Service Branch, to provide advice on computer systems to CCTA customers; another to give advice to departments on preparing policy evaluation plans; and a full time secondee to HM Treasury as part of the ongoing programme of inward and outward secondments.

1990-91
Rental of a manual on synthetic Work Measurement data.
Pursuit project: the preparation of a commodity and supplier coding strategy.
There were also 4 secondments: one to CCTA Systems Consultancy Service Branch to provide advice on computer systems to CCTA customers; another to give advice to departments on preparing policy evaluation plans; and two full time secondees to HM Treasury as part of the ongoing programme of inward and outward secondments.
1991-92
Preparation of Guidance on Contract Strategy and selection for Works Projects; and Project Evaluation and Audits.
There were also three secondments: one to CCTA Systems Consultancy Service Branch to provide advice on computer systems to CCTA customers; and two full time secondees to HM Treasury as part of the ongoing programme of inward and outward secondments.
The total value to date of the consultancies listed amount to £678,536. The cost of the individual contracts is subject to commercial confidentiality.

Share Ownership

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *127*, what percentage of the adult population of Great Britain, who also own other shares, own shares in *(a)* privatisation issues, *(b)* Abbey National and *(c)* Trustee Savings Bank taking these three categories (i) singly and (ii) in combination.

Mr. Maude: The 1991 Treasury-stock exchange survey showed that, of the adult population in Great Britain who also owned other shares: 9 per cent. owned privatisation issues; 4 per cent. owned Abbey National shares; and 2 per cent. owned Trustee Savings Bank shares. Figures for combinations of holding in privatisation issues, Abbey National shares, and Trustee Savings Bank shares, by adults owning other shares are not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Fraud

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to require auditors of public limited companies to report material fraud discovered by them to his Department.

Mr. Redwood: All auditors should apply the guidance in the auditing guideline issued in February 1990 on the auditor's responsibility in relation to fraud, other irregularities and errors. If an auditor does not apply the guidance in any particular case, he must be prepared to explain why he has failed to do so. The guideline makes it clear that where the auditor is aware of matters of concern and does not have confidence that they will be properly dealt with by management, he should, if he considers that disclosure should be made in the public interest, disclose the matters to the appropriate authorities, which may include my Department.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the statutory provisions relating to duties on an auditor to detect and report material fraud.

Mr. Redwood: Case law has established that where auditors suspect significant fraud or other serious misconduct, the public interest in disclosing their suspicions to the appropriate authorities outweighs any obligation of confidence they owe unless they act maliciously. There is, however, no general legal duty to disclose. Legislation passed in 1986-87 applying to the regulated sectors—banks, building societies, insurance and investment businesses—has clearly removed any legal obstacle there was to auditors reporting relevant matters to the regulators. So far as insurance and investment businesses are concerned, the legislation gives the Secretary of State power, if it appears to him that auditors are not subject to satisfactory rules or guidance issued by a professional body specifying when they should notify him of relevant matters, to make rules imposing a duty on auditors to disclose in the circumstances he specifies. The Treasury has broadly similar powers in respect of auditors of banks and building societies as regards provision of information to the Bank of England and the Building Societies Commission. So far we have not thought it necessary to make rules in place of the professional bodies' guidance but we keep the matter under review. In some cases in the public sector the auditor has a statutory responsibility to report certain matters arising from the audit, including significant fraud or other irregularities, to a third party such as a sponsoring department.

Company Directors (Remuneration)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation under which shareholders would be specifically required to fix director remuneration.

Mr. Redwood: Directors' remuneration for executive services involves the negotiation of detailed contracts. The body of shareholders of most public companies cannot easily perform this function which is usually best undertaken by the company's board of directors. In carrying out this function the directors must have regard to their legal duties to the company, the requirements of the Companies Act 1985 and the fact that they will in any case be held to account by the shareholders. Shareholders have a right to inspect director's contracts and to dismiss directors if they do not approve of their action.

Small Companies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to lighten the annual accounting and auditing burdens on small companies.

Mr. Redwood: I refer to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) on 21 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *131*. The Government remain committed to minimising burdens on business. I shall soon announce a new programme of work under the Government's deregulation initiative.

Corporate Governance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will launch an independent investigation into corporate governance in Britain.

Mr. Redwood: No. An independent investigation is being carried out by the Cadbury committee on the financial aspects of corporate governance. I welcome the

interests of this committee and other bodies in various aspects of corporate governance as this ensures a well-informed and lively public debate.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to propose legislation under which in their annual accounts companies would be required to show the turnover generated by products and services more than five years old and less than five years old.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Directors' Salaries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will propose legislation under which employees would have the right to vet directors' salaries.

Mr. Redwood: I see no reason for employees to be given a right to vet directors' salaries.

Manufactured Goods

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing the share of British manufactured exports and of British manufactured imports going to and coming from, and the balance of impact on trade with, *(a)* Germany, *(b)* the United States of America, and *(c)* France, for each year since 1970.

Mr. Sainsbury: Figures for before 1975 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The available information is contained in the tables.

1. The available information, for the years since 1975, is given in the following table. Manufactures are defined as sections 5 to 8 of the Standard International Trade Classification.

United Kingdom trade in manufactures

	Exports £ billion	*Imports £ billion*	*Crude balance £ billion*
World			
1975	16·5	12·8	3·7
1976	21·3	16·9	4·4
1977	27·2	21·7	5·5
1978	30·1	26·1	4·0
1979	33·1	31·4	1·7
1980	34·8	31·8	3·0
1981	34·9	32·0	2·9
1982	37·3	37·1	0·2
1983	40·1	44·9	−4·9
1984	46·7	53·0	−6·3
1985	52·5	58·3	−5·8
1986	54·6	62·8	−8·2
1987	61·0	71·0	−10·0
1988	66·2	83·5	−17·3
1989	76·4	96·0	−19·6
1990	84·2	98·2	−13·9

	Exports £ billion	*Imports £ billion*	*Crude balance £ billion*	*United Kingdom share of total Exports per cent.*	*Imports per cent.*
Germany					
1975	1·0	1·8	−0·7	6·3	13·9
1976	1·5	2·5	−1·1	6·9	14·9
1977	1·9	3·3	−1·4	7·1	15·3
1978	2·3	4·2	−1·9	7·5	16·0
1979	2·8	5·4	−2·6	8·6	17·2
1980	3·2	5·2	−2·0	9·2	16·4
1981	3·2	5·4	−2·2	9·2	16·9
1982	3·5	6·9	−3·4	9·2	18·5
1983	4·0	9·0	−5·0	9·9	20·0
1984	4·9	10·2	−5·2	10·6	19·2
1985	5·8	11·8	−6·0	11·0	20·2
1986	6·4	13·3	−6·8	11·8	21·1
1987	7·3	14·9	−7·6	12·0	21·0
1988	8·0	16·7	−8·8	12·0	20·0
1989	9·3	19·1	−9·7	12·2	19·8
1990	11·0	18·8	−7·8	13·1	19·2
United States of America					
1975	1·5	1·7	−0·2	8·9	13·3
1976	2·0	2·2	−0·2	9·6	13·2
1977	2·5	2·7	−0·3	9·0	12·5
1978	2·8	3·0	−0·2	9·5	11·6
1979	3·1	3·6	−0·5	9·3	11·5
1980	3·3	4·7	−1·4	9·3	14·7
1981	3·5	4·6	−1·1	10·1	14·5
1982	3·8	5·1	−1·3	10·2	13·7
1983	5·0	6·0	−1·0	12·6	13·3
1984	6·5	7·7	−1·2	13·9	14·6
1985	8·1	8·4	−0·3	15·3	14·3
1986	8·2	7·0	1·1	15·0	11·2
1987	8·7	7·8	0·9	14·3	11·0
1988	8·9	9·3	−0·4	13·5	11·1
1989	10·2	11·9	−1·6	13·4	12·4
1990	10·6	12·6	−2·0	12·6	12·9
France					
1975	0·9	1·1	−0·2	5·7	8·5
1976	1·4	1·5	−0·1	6·4	8·8
1977	1·6	1·9	−0·3	6·0	8·9
1978	1·9	2·4	−0·5	6·2	9·2
1979	2·3	3·0	−0·7	7·0	9·7
1980	2·5	3·0	−0·4	7·3	9·4
1981	2·5	3·1	−0·6	7·1	9·5
1982	2·8	3·4	−0·5	7·6	9·1
1983	2·9	4·0	−1·1	7·3	8·9
1984	3·4	4·6	−1·2	7·3	8·6
1985	3·9	5·1	−1·2	7·4	8·7
1986	4·2	5·7	−1·5	7·7	9·1
1987	5·4	6·5	−1·2	8·8	9·2
1988	6·3	7·5	−1·2	9·5	8·9
1989	7·7	8·7	−1·0	10·0	9·0
1990	8·8	9·5	−0·7	10·4	9·7

Note: Includes the former German Democratic Republic throughout.

Source: "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom".

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask the Office of Fair Trading to investigate the tendering for audits in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to do so, but any information on this matter would be welcomed by the Office of Fair Trading.

Disability

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to propose legislation under which in their annual report, public limited companies would be required to state the number of employees who are registered as disabled.

Mr. Redwood: No. However, schedule 7 to the Companies Act 1985 requires companies employing more than an average of 250 people in each week of the financial year to include in the directors' report a statement describing the policy they have applied during the financial year for the employment, training, career development and promotion of disabled persons.

Low Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to propose legislation under which companies in their annual report would be required to publish the number of adult employees earning less than £9,000 per annum.

Mr. Redwood: No. The primary purpose of a company's annual report and accounts is to inform shareholders and creditors about its financial position. It would be unreasonably burdensome to require the inclusion of the information of the type suggested.

Bankers' Fees

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to propose legislation under which fees paid to bankers for mergers and acquisition advice would be specifically disclosed in the notes to the annual accounts.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has plans to propose legislation under which companies would be required to publish their plans and budgets in the accounts.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Motor Cars

Mr. Tebbit: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the non-tariff barriers which restrain the export within the European Community of motor cars built in the United Kingdom by Japanese-owned companies.

Mr. Leigh: The treaty of Rome guarantees the right of goods manufactured within the Community to circulate freely between member states. The agreement concluded last July between the Community and Japan on trade in cars confirmed that right in respect of cars manufactured by Japanese-owned plants in EC countries. It also committed the Community to agree by the end of 1992 a type-approval regime setting harmonised technical standards for whole vehicle construction, thus removing the potential threat of national standards being used as a non-tariff barrier.

Privatisations

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for the five years prior to privatisation the loss or profit of Girobank; and if he will list any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Redwood: Girobank was sold by the Post Office to the Alliance and Leicester building society on 2 July 1990. Profit, and loans made to it, in the five years before this were as follows:

£ million

Year to end March	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Operating profit	19·4	23·1	23·5	21·6	30·2
Subordinated loan capital from the PO	19·0	19·0	29·0	39·0	39·0

Source: Girobank PLC Report and Accounts 1989-90.

Operating profit is on an historical cost basis before tax and before interest payable on subordinated loan capital.

European Single Market

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what information he has concerning the number of single market measures yet to be implemented by each EC member country; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what discussions he has had with his EC counterparts about the possibility of deleting measures which have yet to be implemented from the EC single market programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: The most recent European Commission report shows that of the 137 measures in the White Paper programme for completion of the single market which should have been implemented up to 10 December 1991, the following were, by member state, outstanding:

	Number
Denmark	9
France	15
United Kingdom	19
Portugal	23
Greece	25
Spain	28
Germany	31
Netherlands	35
Ireland	35
Belgium	38
Luxembourg	43
Italy	65

Implementation of the single market programme is discussed regularly at meetings of the Internal Market Council. We continue to encourage proper implementation by all member states of measures already agreed, and want agreement on the outstanding White Paper proposals provided that they are genuinely necessary to complete the single market.

Business Advice

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many inquiries his 24-hour notice for businesses advice on the single European market has received from businesses in Stoke-on-Trent, North since its inception.

Mr. Sainsbury: Calls to the single market hotline are not recorded on a geographic basis. I refer the hon. Lady to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 24 January 1992, *Official Report*, column *401*.

Telephone Imports

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the penetration of the United Kingdom retail telephone industry of imports from the far east, and upon their effect on the telephone manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* A full measure of penetration into the United Kingdom retail telephone market of imports from the far east cannot be obtained without disproportionate cost. The most recent figures available from the Central Statistical Office show that telephone handsets worth £74 million were imported from the far east in the first 10 months of 1991.

The United Kingdom has an open telecommunications equipment market. The consumer has benefited considerably from this and can now choose from more than 500 approved items of retail terminal equipment. United Kingdom equipment suppliers themselves take advantage of low costs of manufacture in the far east. Some major suppliers import the more basic handsets to complement their own manufacture of higher value, more sophisticated, telephones and systems while others design in the United Kingdom and source from manufacturing plants abroad.

Indonesia

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the turnover in trade between Britain and Indonesia for each year since 1975.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The information is in the table.

United Kingdom trade with Indonesia

	Exports £ million	*Imports £ million*
1975	62·2	15·1
1976	80·8	22·5
1977	86·7	28·8
1978	83·6	33·4
1979	75·8	56·1
1980	112·2	57·0
1981	139·2	73·8
1982	212·1	90·7
1983	193·6	169·4
1984	186·7	181·5
1985	175·3	156·5
1986	196·5	141·2
1987	236·0	144·8
1988	203·3	233·7
1989	183·9	273·1
1990	198·0	327·9

Source: "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom".

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the numbers of people now registered as unemployed in the Greater London area who have been out of work for periods of up to three months, six months, nine months, one year, two years, three years or longer.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available information, relating to October 1991, is contained in the table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the Library.

Claimant unemployment by duration in Greater London October 1991[1]

Duration of unemployment	*Number of unemployed*
Up to 3 months	114,667
3 to 6 months	71,667
6 to 9 months	55,645
9 to 12 months	32,987
1 to 2 years	54,748
2 to 3 years	14,458
Over 3 years	22,764

[1] Unemployment figures by duration are produced quarterly and are on the unadjusted basis.

Employment Training

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of people who had completed an employment training scheme course during the year ended December 1991; and how many found employment at the end of the course.

Mr. Jackson: In Great Britain in the year to March 1991, the latest date for which information is available, 48 per cent. of leavers had completed their agreed training and 33 per cent. of all leavers were on full-time, part-time or self-employment three months after leaving employment training. Absolute numbers are not available because not all trainees respond to the follow-up questionnaire.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those people who have completed an employment training scheme course have obtained a work qualification at the end of the course.

Mr. Jackson: In the year to March 1991, the latest period for which information is available, 42 per cent. of employment training trainees completing their agreed training in Great Britain successfully obtained a qualification or a credit towards one.

Environmental Training

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on progress made with the pilot programme established in 1990 by the Training Agency to develop centres of excellence for environmental training; what resources have been committed to this programme; and what plans he has to extend the national environmental training programme.

Mr. Jackson: The centres of excellence were piloted between January 1990 and March 1991 at a cost of £435,000. A review at the end of 1990 concluded that they had a useful potential role working with local training and enterprise councils to promote and develop environmental training and services.

Responsibility for the centres has now passed to TECs, although money is this year available to TECs to test new approaches to environmental training. The Welsh Centre of Excellence, along with a number of other projects, has received funding in this way.

National Training Federation

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many meetings have taken place between his officials and representatives of the National Training Federation since the meeting on 9 September 1991 between the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), and representatives of the federation accompanied by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East.

Mr. Jackson: Officials have met representatives of the National Training Federation on five occasions since the meeting on 9 September.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the proportion of male employees in Great Britain who were part-time.

Mr. Jackson: In September 1991, the latest date for which information is available, 9 per cent. of male employees were working part time in Great Britain.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will estimate the percentage of all women part-time workers in Great Britain earning less than *(a)* £2·50 per hour, *(b)* £3 per hour, *(c)* £3·60 per hour, *(d)* £4 per hour, *(e)* £4·50 per hour and *(f)* £5 per hour;

(2) if he will estimate the percentage of part-time non-manual workers in Great Britain earning less than *(a)* £2·50 per hour, *(b)* £3 per hour, *(c)* £3·60 per hour, *(d)* £4 per hour, *(e)* £4·50 per hour and *(f)* £5 per hour;

(3) if he will estimate the percentage of women part-time manual workers in Great Britain earning less than *(a)* £2·50 per hour, *(b)* £3 per hour, *(c)* £3·60 per hour, *(d)* £4 per hour, *(e)* £4·50 per hour and *(f)* £5 per hour.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey closest to that requested is given in the table.

Percentages of part-time women workers on adult rates whose earnings were unaffected by absence: Great Britain, 1991 New Earnings Survey.

	Earning less than £ per hour						
Category	*£2·50*	*£3·00*	*£3·60*	*£4·00*	*£4·50*	*£4·80*	*£5·40*
All part-time women	5·3	19·9	45·1	58·3	69·4	74·7	81·8
Part-time non-manual women	3·3	13·3	34·2	45·6	58·1	64·5	73·7
Part-time manual women	8·7	31·3	63·7	80·1	88·9	92·2	95·6

Training Organisations

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what contacts have been established between the G10 group of TEC chief executives and the National Training Federation.

Mr. Jackson: The group of 10 TEC chairmen and the network of TEC chief executives are establishing contacts with a number of organisations. The nature of these contacts is a matter for them.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consultations he has had with the chief inspector of the nuclear installations inspectorate concerning the date of completion of consideration of the long-term safety reviews of Sizewell A and Dungeness A nuclear power stations.

Mr. Forth: None. The activities of Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

Women Workers

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for part-time women workers *(a)* average gross weekly earnings, *(b)* average weekly hours total and overtime and *(c)* average gross hourly earnings for (i) manual, (ii) non-manual and (iii) all part-time women workers in (1) Great Britain, (2) Scotland and (3) each region in Scotland.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey is given in the tables.

Average gross weekly and hourly earnings and hours of part time manual women on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence

	April 1991			
	Average gross		*Average gross*	
	Weekly earnings (£)	*Hourly earnings (£)*	*Total hours*	*Overtime hours*
Borders	[1]—	—	—	—
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	3·30	18·5	0·6
Grampian	—	3·35	17·6	0·8
Highland	—	—	—	—
Lothian	67·8	3·65	18·9	0·9
Strathclyde	70·1	3·48	20·7	0·9
Tayside	—	3·37	17·4	0·9
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—
Scotland	66·3	3·44	19·4	0·8
Great Britain	67·6	3·51	19·7	1·0

Source: New Earnings Survey.

[1] "—" denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimates.

Note: It is estimated that around one fifth of part-time women employees were not covered by the NES because their gross weekly earnings were below the PAYE threshold.

Average gross weekly and hourly earnings and hours of part time non-manual women on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence

	April 1991			
	Average gross		Average gross	
	Weekly earnings (£)	Hourly earnings (£)	Total hours	Overtime hours
Borders	[1]—	—	—	—
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	—	—
Grampian	—	—	—	—
Highland	—	—	—	—
Lothian	107·5	—	—	—
Strathclyde	100·6	5·02	20·5	1·0
Tayside	—	—	—	—
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—
Scotland	100·9	5·01	20·3	1·0
Great Britain	95·0	4·92	19·5	0·9

Source: New Earnings Survey.
[1] "—" denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimates.
Note: It is estimated that around one fifth of part-time women employees were not covered by the NES because their gross weekly earnings were below the PAYE threshold.

Average gross weekly and hourly earnings and hours of all part time women on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence

	April 1991			
	Average gross		Average gross	
	Weekly earnings (£)	Hourly earnings (£)	Total hours	Overtime hours
Borders	[1]—	—	—	—
Central	—	—	—	—
Dumfries/Galloway	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	4·02	19·4	1·1
Grampian	81·1	4·30	18·7	0·9
Highland	—	—	—	—
Lothian	90·4	4·47	20·1	1·1
Strathclyde	88·5	4·39	20·6	1·0
Tayside	76·9	4·06	18·5	0·9
Islands	—	—	—	—
Highlands/Islands	—	—	—	—
Scotland	86·1	4·36	19·9	0·9
Great Britain	84·9	4·41	19·6	1·0

Source: New Earnings Survey.
[1] "—" denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimates.
Note: It is estimated that around one fifth of part-time women employees were not covered by the NES because their gross weekly earnings were below the PAYE threshold.

WALES

A48, Castleton

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 10 December, *Official Report*, column *406*, on what dates and for how many days the unused carriageway between the two A48 (M) carriageways at Castleton has been used; what was the nature and cost of the larger contract of which the unused carriageway formed part; who decided that the unused carriageway should be provided; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The presently unused length of carriageway at Castleton was in use for 18 days between 26 July 1989 and 12 August 1989 inclusive. It was provided and used as a temporary diversion for the A48M Castleton-St. Mellons carriageway strengthening work which cost £1·8 million. Its construction was approved by the director of highways as an alternative to major traffic disruption.

Baltic States

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with the chairman of the Welsh development agency the ways in which that agency can help establish trade links between Wales and the three Baltic states.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes.

Farmworkers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the numbers of *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farmworkers employed in each county in Wales in June 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: The figures are shown in the table:

Number of farmers and farmworkers in June 1991

	Whole-time			Part-time				All workers			
County	*Principal farmers*	*Other partners*	*Total*	*Principal farmers*	*Other partners*	*Total*	*Total farmers and directors*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*[1]	*Salaried managers*
Clwyd	2,403	616	3,019	791	423	1,214	4,233	2,192	461	2,653	55
Dyfed	6,915	1,408	8,323	2,383	905	3,288	11,611	4,812	1,546	6,358	51
Gwent	1,275	241	1,516	527	234	761	2,277	1,135	318	1,453	31
Gwynedd	2,827	525	3,352	1,100	388	1,488	4,840	1,902	332	2,234	45
Mid Glamorgan	550	116	666	236	95	331	997	512	123	635	10
Powys	3,766	973	4,739	1,045	558	1,603	6,342	2,975	454	3,429	41
South Glamorgan	290	75	365	112	64	176	541	450	132	582	21
West Glamorgan	483	106	589	224	96	320	909	479	147	626	10
Wales	18,509	4,060	22,569	6,418	2,763	9,181	31,750	14,457	3,513	17,970	264

[1] Excluding salaried managers.
Source: June Agricultural Census 1991.
Note: Figures exclude minor holdings not included in the June Census.

Bats

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will issue a development control policy note for the guidance of local planning authorities in relation to applications in which an issue arises from the presence of bats on an application site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I are in the process of preparing a planning policy guidance note on nature conservation in general. This note, which will be subject to public consultation, will advise local authorities of the provisions of various conservation laws including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which affords protection to certain species of bats and other scheduled wild animals.

Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list all the *(a)* chairmen or women, *(b)* vice-chairmen or women and *(c)* members of the boards of non-departmental public bodies in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answers of 12 December 1991 and 19 December 1991, which listed the full and part-time public appointments for which I am responsible. In addition, there are a number of bodies where members appoint their chairman and deputy chairman from amongst their own membership. The names of these chairmen and deputy chairmen are listed in the table. A new chairman has been appointed to the Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board since my previous reply and his name is included in the table. Also it has been noticed that the membership of the Historic Buildings Council was omitted from the original answer, this information is given in the table.

Brecon Beacons National Park
Chairman—Mr. R. H. Williams
Vice-Chairman—Mr. D. Jones

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Committee
Chairman—Mr. D. Halket-Jones
Vice-Chairman—Mr. R. Pratt

Snowdonia National Park Committee
Chairman—Mr. J. Tudor
Vice-Chairman—Mr. F. Jones

COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS

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Chairman—Mr. D. Northwood
Vice-Chairman—Cllr. T. L. Davies

Clwyd North
Chairman—Mrs. B. A. Thompson
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Carmarthen/Dinefwr
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Vice-Chairman—Cllr. F. R. Jones

Llanelli/Dinefwr
Chairman—Mr. W. M. Jones
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Ceredigion
Chairman—Mr. A. Thomas
Vice-Chairman—Mrs. M. Griffiths

Pembrokeshire
Chairman—Miss M. J. Thomas
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South Gwent
Chairman—Mr. M. G. Welsh
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Chairman—Mrs. J. Arthur
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Aberconwy
Chairman—Mr. C. S. Brady
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Arfon/Dwyfor
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Vice-Chairman—Mr. R. G. Hughes

Meirionnydd
Chairman—Cllr. D. Price
Vice-Chairman—Miss D. Worthington

Ynys Môn
Chairman—Mrs. K. Dowgan
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Chairman—Mrs. M. Hughes
Vice-Chairman—Mr. G. Glover

Ogwr
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Vice-Chairman—Mrs. Y. M. Griffiths

Rhymney Valley
Chairman—Mr. J. W. Owen
Vice-Chairman—Mr. J. Shaw

Brecon/Radnor
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Chairman—Mrs. M. Francis
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Cardiff
Chairman—Mr. E. G. Owen
Vice-Chairman—Dr. P. Armitage

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Vice-Chairman—City Cllr. M. D. Harris

Swansea/Lliw Valley
Chairman—City Cllr. R. James
Vice-Chairman—Mrs. I. Aubrey

HIGHER EDUCATION CORPORATIONS (INITIAL APPOINTMENTS)

Polytechnic of Wales
Chairman—Mr. Ruid Plaut
Vice-Chairman—Mr. Roy Cull

Swansea Institute of Higher Education
Chairman—Carl E. Hadley
Vice-Chairman—W. E. Edwards

Cardiff Institute of Higher Education[1]

Welsh College of Music and Drama
Chairman—Geraint Stanley Jones
Vice-Chairman—Rev. Bob Morgan

Gwent College of Higher Education
Chairman—Alan Burton
Vice-Chairman—Elwyn Tudno Jones

Coleg Normal Bangor
Chairman—Gwilym Humphrey
Vice-Chairman—Alun Evans

Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board
Chairman—Mr. Roy Bichan

Historic Buildings Council for Wales
Chairman—The Marquess of Anglesey
Members—Professor John Eynon
The Earl Lloyd George
Dr. Prys Morgan

Mr Lindsay Evans
Mr. Richard Haslam
Mr. Thomas Lloyd

[1] This body has not yet met, so Chairman and Vice-Chairman have not yet been appointed.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of the consultancy contract given to Mott, MacDonald of Cambridge in groundwater modelling in connection with the report by Mr. R. F. Stoner of Southampton university on the groundwater consultation exercise on the side-effects of the Cardiff bay barrage, published on 20 January.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department's contract was for Mr. Stoner's advice and report with the university of Southampton, and not Mott, MacDonald.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the projects, the purposes and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Curry: Since 1989 Coopers and Lybrand has carried out projects to provide advice to the Ministry on the following matters:

Regional Structure Review
administration of grant and subsidy schemes.
future organisation of regional administration and the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS).

Information Technology
value of video conferencing to the Ministry.
technical assurance for the farm survey system study.

The cost of these projects is a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total number of individual animals by species in which BSE has been confirmed in each of *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989, *(c)* 1990 and *(d)* 1991.

Mr. Maclean: Bovine spongiform encephalopathy is a disease of cattle. The total number of cases confirmed by date of clinical onset in the requested years is as follows: *(a)* 3,038 *(b)* 7,614 *(c)* 14,332 *(d)* 19,792 (provisional)

Multi-rig Trawls

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ban twin-prawn rigs.

Mr. Curry: Fisheries departments are at present consulting the United Kingdom fishing industry about a range of proposals to conserve nephrops stocks, including the possibility of banning twin or multi-rig trawls in this fishery.

Copies of the consultation document were placed in the Library on 6 December 1991.

Fish Withdrawals

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantities of fish have been withdrawn from sale under arrangements made by his Ministry in the last month.

Mr. Curry: Provisional figures gathered from the ports show that during the month of January, up to and including 23 January, 134 tonnes of fish had been withdrawn from the market under EC Council regulation 3687/91 at ports in England and Wales.

Privatisations

Mr. Page: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give in respect of each privatisation since 1979 *(a)* the loss or profit of each company in the five years prior to privatisation and *(b)* any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Curry: The Department has carried out no privatisations over this period.

Labour Statistics

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the numbers of *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farm workers employed in each county of England in June 1991.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is given in the table. Data are taken from the June 1991 agricultural census and hence exclude minor holdings not covered by the annual census.

Distribution of farmers and workers by county

County	*Principal farmers or partners*	*Other partners or directors*	*Spouses of farmers/partners or directors*	*All other workers*	*Total*
Avon	1,602	588	529	3,576	6,295
Bedfordshire	961	443	341	1,962	3,707
Berkshire	619	216	206	1,475	2,516
Buckinghamshire	1,479	600	460	2,216	4,755
Cambridgeshire	2,842	1,279	929	6,150	11,200
Cheshire	3,567	1,328	1,378	5,442	11,715
Cleveland	355	164	116	440	1,075
Cornwall	5,757	1,775	2,379	5,495	15,406
Cumbria	5,288	2,255	2,378	4,712	14,633
Derbyshire	3,057	1,186	1,078	3,298	8,619
Devon	9,129	2,852	3,921	9,106	25,008
Dorset	2,402	934	985	4,123	8,444
Durham	1,838	739	666	1,816	5,059
East Sussex	1,798	601	642	3,879	6,920

County	Principal farmers or partners	Other partners or directors	Spouses of farmers/partners or directors	All other workers	Total
Essex	2,828	1,371	1,032	7,149	12,380
Gloucestershire	2,586	888	932	3,903	8,309
Greater London	336	[illegible]	142	1,071	1,693
Greater Manchester	1,174	[illegible]	430	1,557	3,653
Hampshire	2,343	[illegible]	829	6,606	10,664
Hereford and Worcester	5,487	1,992	2,036	9,463	18,978
Hertfordshire	995	424	338	2,011	3,768
Humberside	2,909	[illegible]	849	6,362	11,670
Isle of Wight	417	128	164	789	1,498
Isles of Scilly	56	10	27	71	164
Kent	3,325	1,323	1,136	14,751	20,535
Lancashire	4,456	1,989	1,893	6,969	15,307
Leicestershire	2,190	943	719	3,227	7,079
Lincolnshire	4,779	2,415	1,676	13,086	21,956
Merseyside	401	176	155	838	1,570
Norfolk	4,085	1,710	1,274	11,856	18,925
North Yorkshire	7,255	3,164	2,589	10,348	23,356
Northamptonshire	1,584	717	530	2,389	5,220
Northumberland	2,005	935	662	2,895	6,497
Nottinghamshire	1,554	764	487	3,113	5,918
Oxfordshire	1,630	638	552	3,288	6,108
Shropshire	4,035	1,539	1,592	5,547	12,713
Somerset	4,651	1,676	1,777	6,501	14,605
South Yorkshire	1,176	532	412	1,547	3,667
Staffordshire	3,667	1,349	1,378	4,892	11,286
Suffolk	2,848	1,287	997	7,802	12,934
Surrey	1,339	422	487	3,477	5,725
Tyne and Wear	223	96	64	370	753
Warwickshire	1,923	755	638	3,176	6,492
West Midlands	366	154	127	775	1,422
West Sussex	1,730	578	682	6,131	9,121
West Yorkshire	2,490	866	853	2,994	7,203
Wiltshire	2,370	889	820	4,340	8,419
ENGLAND	119,907	47,762	44,287	212,984	424,940

Fruit and Vegetables

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer on 16 December 1991, *Official Report*, column 77, and the subsequent response from the intervention board, whether the cauliflowers, apples and pears that were withdrawn and ploughed into the ground or used as animal feed were sold by the intervention board and at what price; who is eligible to use these fruit and vegetables; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: This is a matter for the chief executive of the intervention board executive agency who will write to the hon. Member.

Agricultural Land (Planning Applications)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to the answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 20 January, *Official Report*, column 23, if he will give the figure for the number of planning applications that were objected to for each year since 1980.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested is:

Year	Number
1980	366
1981	489
1982	251
1983	157
1984	203
1985	176
1986	203
1987	58
1988	31
1989	33
1990	26

Sheep

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why there has been an increase in the length of the claim for sheep premium form SAP1B (Rev G1991) for 1992.

Mr. Curry: The 1992 sheep annual premium scheme claim form has been expanded in order to give effect to new European Community rules concerning the eligibility for premium of members of producer groups, shepherds and producers who lease all or part of their flocks.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the effect on the health of the ewe flock of requiring to replace fallen ewes within the period in order to retain premium payments.

Mr. Curry: It is not possible to access what, if any, effect the replacement rules would have on the health of the ewe flock. However, I would expect the prudent farmer to take all necessary precautions to ensure that only healthy animals are introduced into his flock, irrespective of whether this is during or outwith the sheep annual premium scheme retention periods.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many man hours he expects the

average sheep farmer will require to comply with the recording and correspondence requirements of the new system for claiming ewe premium.

Mr. Curry: The time sheep farmers require to complete the recording and correspondence obligations of the sheep annual premium varies considerably, not least according to the number of sheep losses they incur. The obligations —which in a modified form already existed prior to 1992 —should be seen against the background of an expected average premium payment of about £4,500 per producer in 1992.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the benefits to United Kingdom agriculture of the additional requirements in the sheep premium application procedure.

Mr Curry: The new rules for sheep annual premium are designed to improve the effective administration of a scheme which is estimated to be worth some £400 million to United Kingdom producers in 1992.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the effect on the orderly marketing of barren, lambless and milkless ewes of the lapsing of premium unless ewes are held until the end of the period.

Mr. Curry: It has been a requirement of the sheep annual premium scheme since 1984 that eligible animals must be kept throughout one of the two 100-day retention periods in order to benefit from premium. In the United Kingdom these periods have been set so as to minimise any adverse effect on the orderly marketing of sheep.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what control the EC has over the enforcement of the ewe premium arrangements in France, Italy, Greece and Spain; and what steps he intends to take to ensure that they will be enforced.

Mr. Curry: European Community rules on enforcement of the sheep annual premium scheme are administered by the national authorities in each member state. Audit inspections are carried out by European Community auditors in all member states to ensure that they operate the scheme in accordance with the rules and member states face financial penalties should they fail to do so. The United Kingdom takes the lead in the Community in pressing for the effective enforcement of EC schemes and will continue so to do.

SCOTLAND

Ports Policing

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements are made in Scotland for funding police forces for special branch ports policing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government pay police grant of 51 per cent. on all approved net expenditure for the police including provision for ports policing. Exceptionally 100 per cent. funding is provided to Dumfries and Galloway constabulary for the costs of those officers who are engaged entirely on prevention of terrorism duties at the ports of Stranraer and Cairnryan. This arrangement is in recognition of the exceptional demands which policing of these ports makes on the resources of this small force.

Farm Workers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the numbers of *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farm workers employed in each region of Scotland in June 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of farmers, spouses doing farm work and farm workers employed on main agricultural holdings in June 1991, by local authority region, is shown in the table.

Region	*Number at June 1991*		
	Farmers	*Spouses doing farm work*	*Farmworkers*
Borders	1,321	561	2,427
Central	783	371	978
Dumfries and Galloway	2,372	1,157	3,784
Fife	759	328	1,687
Grampian	4,737	1,947	4,911
Highland	3,246	1,343	1,957
Lothian	747	301	1,809
Strathclyde	4,232	2,201	5,170
Tayside	2,081	833	3,421
Islands	3,120	1,351	1,169
Scotland	23,398	10,393	27,313

Note: These figures are not comparable with those for previous years due to a change in the basis of the figures in 1991 which had the effect of adding a net 3,400 holdings to the main holdings list. This resulted in an increase in 1991 of some 2,300 occupiers, 800 spouses and 800 farmworkers compared with figures on the previous basis.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the proposals from health boards for local hospital closures which he has confirmed, since 1979, where the application has been accompanied by a generally favourable assessment of the hospital by the Scottish Hospital Advisory Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Health boards are responsible for assessing need, for purchasing services to meet the needs they identify and to set and monitor standards. It is for each board to decide how best to discharge those responsibilities and what factors to take into account in doing so.

Scottish Hospital Advisory Service

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the composition of the Scottish Hospital Advisory Service, indicating in the case of each member their specific medical specialty.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Dr. A. W. Drummond, director, consultant psychiatrist; Mr. Ross Mitchell, administrator; Dr. Desmond Cormack, nurse; and Mr. J. Wood, social work, part time.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those occasions since 1979 when, in advance of seeking approval for the closure of a local hospital, the health board has preceded the application by entering into

a commercial contract with the private sector aimed at substituting the NHS care so provided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not held centrally. Arrangements made by health boards prior to submitting an application for closure of an NHS facility are for the boards themselves to determine. But decisions on hospital closures are for Ministers; health boards should not, therefore, enter into permanent arrangements which would pre-empt ministerial decisions.

Relocation

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of Scottish Enterprise and local development agencies towards providing assistance to companies which have plants located in England and which they wish to relocate in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* Scottish Enterprise and the local enterprise companies would assess very carefully any proposals from companies wishing to relocate to Scotland before considering whether it would be appropriate to offer assistance. Any assistance provided would be within the terms of arrangements agreed by the Government and would take account of factors such as employment displacement.

Hay Premium

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for a hay premium, as outlined in the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Conservation Review 1991, a copy of which has been sent to him, to conserve the corncrake in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* My right hon. Friend has no plans to propose a hay premium but measures to protect ground nesting birds such as the corncrake are already in place in the Machair of the Uists and Benbecula, Barra and Vatersay environmentally sensitive area. Consideration will be given to the need for similar measures in other relevant areas selected for further designations.

Dogs

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he intends to publish the report of the Scottish working party on dogs; and what action he intends to take on the recommendations made in that report.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 24 Janaury 1992]:* My right hon. Friend does not plan to publish the report of the Scottish working group on dogs.

The Government have already tackled a number of the issues raised by the group in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the Breeding of Dogs Act 1991. On 1 April 1992 we intend to introduce regulations under sections 149-151 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to deal with the problems associated with stray dogs and the enforcement of the existing collar and tag requirements. Changes recommended by the group to the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 and the introduction of dog byelaws are currently under consideration.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Farm Workers

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the numbers of *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farm workers employed in each county in Northern Ireland in June 1981 and June 1991.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is given in the table. The figures are from the June agricultural censuses for 1981 and 1991 and exclude minor holdings not covered by the census:

	Farmers		*Spouses of farmers*		*All other farmworkers*	
County	*1981*	*1991*	*1981*	*1991*	*1981*	*1991*
Antrim	7,090	6,463	1,269	1,044	3,731	3,792
Armagh	4,806	4,357	608	531	2,086	2,315
Down	7,428	6,741	1,102	953	4,251	4,091
Fermanagh	4,368	4,052	646	545	1,839	1,549
Londonderry	4,847	4,595	724	563	2,758	2,796
Tyrone	8,340	8,083	1,110	926	3,660	3,816
Northern Ireland	36,879	34,291	5,459	4,562	18,325	18,359

Extradition

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Royal Ulster Constabulary have sought the extradition of Kevin McKenna from the Irish Republic in relation to IRA activity.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is not our practice either to confirm or to deny the existence of particular extradition requests in advance of an arrest and the bringing of the person concerned before a court.

Angelo Fusco

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the representations he has made to the Government of the Republic of Ireland following the release on bail of Angelo Fusco.

Dr. Mawhinney: We are seeking the return of Angelo Fusco to Northern Ireland, from the Republic of Ireland, to serve a life sentence for murder, two life sentences for attempted murder and two determinate sentences for possession of firearms with intent.

We do not comment on Irish judicial decisions; but I can confirm that we have expressed concern to the Irish Government about the implications of bail in the case.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will state, in list form, the length of time each prisoner presently held on remand in Northern Ireland has been in prison.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* It would be inappropriate to list individual prisoners on

remand in Northern Ireland, however, the following table gives a summary of the numbers of prisoners—male and female—held on remand.

Time on remand	*Number of prisoners*
Less than 12 months	334
More than 12 months but less than 18 months	35
More than 18 months but less than 2 years	12
2 years and over	11
Total	392

Note: The above figures relate to prisoners serving continuous and uninterrupted periods in custody as at 30 November 1991.

DEFENCE

Services Sports

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the official sports and games given financial support by (i) the Army, (ii) the Royal Navy and (iii) the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The following sports are financially supported by one or more of the services:

Association Football
Badminton
Basketball
Boxing
Canoeing
Cricket
Cycling
Equestrian sport/equitation
Fencing
Gliding
Golf
Hockey
Judo
Lawn Tennis
(Modern) Pentathlon
Rowing
Rugby Union Football
Sailing
Squash/Rackets
Table Tennis
(Sports) Parachuting
Athletics/Cross Country/Tug of War
Ski-ing/Bobsleighing
Swimming/Diving/Water Polo
Target Shooting/Rifle Shooting/Small Arms
Gymnastics/Trampoline
Angling
Motor Sports
Mountaineering
Orienteering
Volleyball
Sub acqua
Model Aircraft
Netball
Rounders

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been allocated to individual sports in 1990-91.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rugby League

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial support has been given to the playing of rugby league with the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. Only officially recognised sports qualify for financial assistance from public funds towards the cost of travel and purchase of sports equipment. There is, at present, insufficient support within the services for the playing of rugby league to warrant its recognition as an official sport.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what supplies to the Mount Pleasant base in the Falkland islands are purchased from south America; and what encouragement has been given to local companies to provide produce and supplies;

(2) what is the total annual value of contracts undertaken at the Mount Pleasant base by civilian contractors; what proportion of these contracts has been offered to local companies for tender; and what is the total annual value of contracts undertaken by local companies;

(3) what is the value of non-recreational spending by the military garrison in the Falkland islands; and what percentage this represents of the Falklands' gross national product;

(4) what is the annual value of supplies to the Mount Pleasant base *(a)* of Falkland origin and *(b)* of non-Falkland origin purchased from local companies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We encourage the use of local suppliers in meeting our requirements where this is cost effective. Local companies are encouraged to tender for contracts.

Excluding the major contracts with PSA International/Turners for works and maintenance, and with Bristows for the provision of support helicopters, the total annual value of civilian contracts for goods and services at the Mount Pleasant complex is currently some £2·4 million. Over three quarters of these contracts are let to local companies, representing some £777,000 of non-recreational spending by the garrison in the Falklands. The Falkland Islands Government do not publish a figure for gross national product, nor are records available showing the origin of the goods supplied by local companies.

No supplies are currently purchased directly by the garrison from south America, although a trial has been conducted to establish whether such arrangements would be feasible and cost effective. The results of the trial are being considered.

Incendiary Devices

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a detailed list on an annual basis since 1962 of the number of incendiary devices that have been detonated by the Royal Navy on the marshes of North Gower; and if he will indicate the likely date when all such devices will have been removed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records of items cleared from the North Gower marshes are available only for the past two years. In 1990, 99 and in 1991, 130 devices were disposed of. It is not possible to forecast when all such devices will have been removed as the exposure of unexploded ordnance is dependant upon tidal movements.

RAF Greenham Common

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the future use of RAF Greenham Common.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *190*.

Disability Compensation

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *190*, if he will list the claims now outstanding under the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987, showing names and date of accident.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: To list the information requested would breach confidentiality and be in contravention of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Injury Claims

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by amount the interim payments paid, over the last five years, to those injured members of the armed forces whose claims are awaiting precise assessment and agreement as to their final level of disability.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently some 30 cases outstanding on which interim payments have been made. The payments vary between £2,000 and £150,000.

Tactical Air-to-surface Missiles

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department was informed of President Bush's decision to cancel the United States Government's procurement of the SRAM-T missile; and for how long his Department continued to consider the SRAM-T as a possible option for the United Kingdom's tactical air-to-surface missile following President Bush's decision;

(2) pursuant to his answer, 19 December, *Official Report*, column *284*, if he will list the systems that are currently being developed in the United States which are being considered by his Department as a possible replacement for the WE177 bomb.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave the hon. Member on 19 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *284*.

Equipment

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's assessment of how many *(a)* combat aircraft *(b)* armoured combat vehicles, *(c)* artillery pieces and *(d)* attack helicopters, as presently defined under the conventional forces in Europe treaty counting rules, the United Kingdom will deploy by 1995.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) on 3 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *88*.

Trident

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the United Kingdom is paying the United States Government towards the research and development costs of the Trident D5 missile; how much has already been paid; and how much is outstanding.

Mr. Alan Clark: The United Kingdom has undertaken to pay a fixed, but index-linked, contribution towards the research and development of the Trident II D5 strategic weapon system, including the missile. At current prices, the total contribution will be some $157 million, of which $58 million has been paid.

Woolwich Garrison

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce a decision about the future of the Royal Artillery garrison at Woolwich.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of initiatives are being pursued to achieve economies in the support area, including training and logistic units.

As no final decisions have been taken it would be inappropriate to comment on individual locations.

Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to reach a decision about the future of the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance; and how many of the staff currently employed at Woolwich will be offered posts after the reorganisation.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Options for the reorganisation of the Directorate General of Defence Quality Assurance are currently being considered and a decision will be made as soon as possible. The retention of the Royal Arsenal site is not among the options under consideration. The future deployment of staff will depend on the decision.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce a decision about the future of the Queen Elizabeth military hospital, Woolwich, in the light of the reduced demands from service personnel and their dependants.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The review I referred to on 21 November, *Official Report*, column *301*, is not yet complete.

Suicides

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many suicides there have been in the armed forces in the last five years; and if he will list them according to date, the barracks where they took place and the regiment of the person committing suicide.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number and dates of the suicides which have taken place within the Armed Forces during the five years 1987-1991, and the available information on the ships, regiments, corps or locations where the suicides occurred, are as listed.

Service and Date of Death	*Ship/Regiment/Corps/Location*
1987	
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	
8 May 1987	HMS Illustrious
19 June 1987	HMS Raleigh
11 July 1987	HMS Orpheus
26 September 1987	HMS Sealion
Army	
29 January 1987	The Queen's Regiment

Service and Date of Death	Ship/Regiment/Corps/Location
30 March 1987	Queen's Own Highlanders
1 April 1987	The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
29 April 1987	Women's Royal Army Corps
27 May 1987	Royal Pioneer Corps
11 August 1987	Royal Engineers
23 August 1987	Royal Corps of Transport
20 September 1987	The Cheshire Regiment
8 October 1987	The Royal Regiment of Wales
8 October 1987	Royal Corps of Transport
11 October 1987	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
16 October 1987	The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment
7 November 1987	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
13 November 1987	Royal Engineers
23 December 1987	Royal Engineers
Royal Air Force	
4 January 1987	Cranwell
12 January 1987	Brawdy
11 February 1987	Waddington
13 February 1987	Stanmore
5 April 1987	Lyneham
21 June 1987	Swinderby
30 November 1987	Laarbruch
29 December 1987	Ayios Nikolaos
Total for 1987: 27	
1988	
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	
2 March 1988	Royal Marine Commando Logistics Regiment
16 May 1988	HMS Gloucester
31 August 1988	HMS Sheffield
7 September 1988	HMS Endurance
28 January 1988	HMS Nelson
Army	
5 January 1988	Royal Army Pay Corps
9 January 1988	Royal Signals
22 January 1988	The Royal Irish Rangers
22 January 1988	The Cheshire Regiment
24 January 1988	Scots Guards
6 February 1988	The Light Infantry
7 February 1988	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
16 February 1988	Intelligence Corps
18 February 1988	Royal Signals
15 March 1988	Royal Signals
1 May 1988	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
23 May 1988	Army Catering Corps
16 June 1988	5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards
23 June 1988	The Duke of Wellington's Regiment
24 June 1988	Royal Army Pay Corps
25 June 1988	Royal Engineers
8 August 1988	Royal Army Medical Corps
14 August 1988	Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
13 September 1988	Royal Engineers
26 October 1988	Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps
7 November 1988	Royal Pioneer Corps
8 November 1988	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
11 November 1988	Royal Signals
14 November 1988	The Royal Hampshire Regiment
2 December 1988	Royal Corps of Transport
3 December 1988	The Light Infantry
7 December 1988	Royal Engineers
11 December 1988	The King's Regiment
Royal Air Force	
9 January 1988	Wyton
20 February 1988	Bruggen
31 March 1988	Marham
6 October 1988	Finningley
22 November 1988	Coltishall
19 December 1988	Bruggen
30 December 1988	Cottesmore
Total for 1988: 40	
1989	
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	
28 February 1989	HMS Neptune
6 March 1989	HMS Dolphin
28 March 1989	HMS Illustrious
13 June 1989	HMS Nelson
8 November 1989	HMS Ocelot
Army	
3 January 1989	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
9 January 1989	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
9 January 1989	The Green Howards
13 March 1989	Royal Tank Regiment
18 March 1989	Royal Artillery
19 March 1989	Royal Signals
19 April 1989	Royal Engineers
23 April 1989	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
17 May 1989	The Royal Hampshire Regiment
27 May 1989	Royal Engineers
29 May 1989	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
11 June 1989	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
13 June 1989	Royal Artillery
13 June 1989	Royal Pioneer Corps
22 June 1989	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
27 June 1989	Royal Army Medical Corps
6 July 1989	The Queen's Regiment
13 July 1989	Royal Tank Regiment
22 July 1989	The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment
3 August 1989	Coldstream Guards
14 August 1989	Army Air Corps
19 August 1989	Coldstream Guards
29 September 1989	Royal Signals
13 October 1989	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
20 October 1989	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
12 November 1989	Royal Engineers
12 November 1989	Royal Signals
Royal Air Force	
22 March 1989	North Luffenham
29 June 1989	Bishop's Court
17 July 1989	Chivenor
11 August 1989	Gutersloh
8 November 1989	Benson
16 November 1989	Gutersloh
Total for 1989: 38	
1990	
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	
5 January 1990	HMS London
3 April 1990	HMS Cleopatra
31 May 1990	HMS York
6 June 1990	HMS Superb
25 June 1990	HMS Illustrious
26 June 1990	HMS Cambeltown
14 September 1990	HMS Cornwall
26 December 1990	HMS Neptune
Army	
3 January 1990	Royal Signals
9 January 1990	Royal Military Police
10 January 1990	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
16 January 1990	Scots Guards
23 January 1990	Grenadier Guards
25 January 1990	Royal Army Pay Corps
18 February 1990	Royal Signals

Service and Date of Death	Ship/Regiment/Corps/Location
5 April 1990	The Royal Green Jackets
6 April 1990	The Royal Green Jackets
29 April 1990	Royal Engineers
5 May 1990	The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment
27 May 1990	Royal Army Medical Corps
6 June 1990	Royal Signals
23 June 1990	Women's Royal Army Corps
28 June 1990	The Royal Green Jackets
1 July 1990	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
6 July 1990	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
21 July 1990	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
11 September 1990	Scots Guards
29 September 1990	Royal Engineers
23 November 1990	Royal Army Veterinary Corps
3 December 1990	Army Catering Corps
18 December 1990	Royal Artillery
Royal Air Force	
3 January 1990	Lyneham
12 January 1990	Stafford
23 January 1990	Neatishead
2 February 1990	Kinloss
21 February 1990	Locking
28 March 1990	Wyton
17 April 1990	Headley Court
23 April 1990	Wroughton
8 May 1990	Gutersloh
14 May 1990	Cranwell
16 May 1990	High Wycombe
30 August 1990	Marham
11 September 1990	Laarbruch
16 September 1990	Finningley
14 October 1990	West Raynham
24 November 1990	Linton-on-Ouse
Total for 1990: 47	
1991	
Royal Navy/Royal Marines	
4 March 1991	HMY Britannia
19 March 1991	HQ CDO Forces RM
26 April 1991	HMS Defiance
10 August 1991	HMS Dolphin
16 October 1991	HMS Gloucester
11 November 213	Ministry of Defence
Army	
1 January 1991	Army Catering Corps
5 January 1991	Royal Engineers
6 January 1991	Royal Military Police
4 February 1991	The Gordon Highlanders
19 February 1991	Royal Engineers
15 April 1991	Royal Artillery
22 April 1991	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineering
29 May 1991	Royal Engineers
29 June 1991	Royal Artillery
6 July 1991	The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment
14 July 1991	The Black Watch
28 July 1991	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineering
3 August 1991	Royal Engineers
9 September 1991	Royal Army Medical Corps
17 September 1991	Army Catering Corps
23 September 1991	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
11 October 1991	Royal Corps of Transport
21 October 1991	Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
26 October 1991	Irish Guards
30 October 1991	Royal Army Medical Corps
3 November 1991	Royal Corps of Transport
13 November 1991	Royal Signals
16 November 1991	Royal Artillery
18 December 1991	The Royal Green Jackets
Royal Air Force	
12 February 1991	Benson
17 February 1991	Kinloss
8 May 1991	Ascension Island
6 June 1991	Akrotiri
17 June 1991	Rheindahlen
18 August 1991	Hereford
7 October 1991	West Raynham
10 October 1991	Bruggen
14 October 1991	Brize Norton
18 November 1991	Stafford
Total for 1991: 40	

British Forces Overseas

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation status of forces agreement as it affects British forces in NATO countries are currently under consideration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No changes to the NATO status of forces agreement itself are currently under consideration. The supplementary agreement to the NATO status of forces agreement—which regulates the status of foreign forces stationed in Germany—is currently under review.

Mr. Mates: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in discussions with the Federal Republic of Germany over the future status of British forces in Germany; what amendments to existing agreements have been proposed as a result of these discussions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The German Government and representatives of the six members of the North Atlantic alliance with forces stationed in Germany—United Kingdom, United States of America, Netherlands, France, Belgium and Canada—began in September 1991 a detailed and wide-ranging review of the supplementary agreement to the NATO status of forces agreement, to which they are the signatories. The supplementary agreement regulates the status of foreign forces stationed in Germany. The review of the agreement, which has taken place in a constructive and co-operative spirit, is continuing. It is detailed and covers a wide range of subjects, including manoeuvres and training, accommodation and construction, transport, and criminal, civil, labour and procedural law.

HEALTH

NHS Reforms

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to meet representatives of the national health service support federation to discuss the impact of national health service reforms.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no such plans at present.

Orthopaedic Staff

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff of consultant status were available at Oldchurch hospital, Romford, for the treatment of adult orthopaedic patients in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1989, and *(c)* the latest date for which figures are available; what are the respective ratios of orthopaedic consultants to the population in the Barking, Havering and Brentwood health district; what is the currently recommended national standard for such appointments; and what is the target set for 2005.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. It is for individual health authorities to decide on the relevant number of consultant posts in each specialty in the light of local needs and circumstances.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he proposes to extend free prescriptions to sufferers from arachnoiditis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no plans to extend the range of conditions which currently attract free prescriptions on medical grounds. There are already wide-ranging exemption arrangements, underpinned by the separate scheme for remission on the ground of low income, which ensure that no one need be deterred from obtaining any necessary medication on financial grounds. Nearly 80 per cent of NHS prescription items are currently dispensed free of charge.

Incontinence

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to general practitioners on the quantities of incontinence pads to be issued on prescription.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Incontinence pads are provided by the hospital and community health services free of charge to NHS patients. They may not be prescribed by general practitioners.

Patients (Confidential Information)

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department takes in conjunction with health authorities and regions and others to guard against the unauthorised release to the press and media of confidential information about day or in-patients attending mental hospitals or treatment centres.

Mr. Dorrell: Guidance was issued to the NHS in 1956 which still applies, commending a routine procedure for answering press inquiries about the condition of individual patients. All persons within the NHS involved in the handling of personal health information owe a legal duty of confidence and fidelity both to patients and to the NHS. In the event of unauthorised disclosure it will be open to the relevant NHS authority to take appropriate disciplinary action against the employee concerned.

Myodil

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reasons prompted the ban on Myodil prior to 1987.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Myodil was withdrawn from the United Kingdom market in 1987 by the manufacturers for commercial reasons.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice has been issued to health authorities and the medical profession on side effects caused by the use of Myodil;

(2) under what conditions and circumstances the use of Mydol was approved for spinal X-ray procedures.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 13 December 1990, *Official Report*, at columns *466-69*.

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the level of use of Myodil in the health service in *(a)* England and *(b)* the Mersey region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. Myodil has not been available commercially since 1987.

General Practitioners (Computers)

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to make provision for a carry-forward of claims made by general practitioners' reimbursement for the cost of computers which the Government have not covered in the current financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: Such a provision already exists within paragraph 58.3 of the general medical services statement of fees and allowances (SFA). A copy of the SFA is available in the Library.

Vitamin B12

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the research unit into vitamin B12 at Westminster children's hospital, London.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The head of the vitamin B12 research unit at Westminster children's hospital has been invited to meet officials to discuss the research unit's current situation.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those hospitals presently able to carry out diagnostic tests on premature babies for vitamin B12 deficiency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *143*, to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, if he will list the non-executive directors appointed to the national health service trusts in the west midlands.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are 47 non-executive directors appointed to the national health service trusts in the west midlands, in the first and second wave of trusts. Their names are

First Community Health NHS Trust
- David Sandy
- Susan Massey
- Michael Heenan
- Kenneth Jackson

Rugby NHS Trust
- Vivian Rizk
- Arnold Laws
- Ian Fell
- Peter Morgan
- Peter Galliford

Mental Health Foundation of Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust
- Judith Dalgarno
- Dr. James Fleming-Patterson
- Roy Trainor
- The Lord Stafford
- Roger Craven

Walsall NHS Trust
- Mavis Bladon
- Calum McFarlane
- Ronald Anderson
- David Frost
- Terence Kelly

South Warwickshire Health Care NHS Trust
- Barry Gillitt
- Amanda Docker
- Peter Clarke
- Douglas Tuckey
- Judith Marsh

Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust
- Julia Jessel
- Frances Beatty
- William Gourlay
- Jeremy Lloyd-Davies
- Professor Kenneth Lee

Premier Health NHS Trust
- Dr. Peter Bradfield
- Peter Atkinson
- Kenneth Hope
- Professor Matthew Olsen
- Irene Davis

Herefordshire Community Health NHS Trust
- Albert Priday
- Heather Philpott
- Richard Smith
- Ronald Higgins
- Magdalen Praill

East Birmingham Hospital NHS Trust
- Philip Couse
- Christine Kenrick
- Lady Sybil Thompson
- Michael Wilcox

Walsgrave NHS Trust
- David Evans
- Harold Corker
- Rita Stewart
- Frank Bunting

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received a copy of the Counsel and Care report on the use of restraint in care homes; and what response he has made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A copy of the Counsel and Care's discussion document was received in the Department on 15 January.

Children's Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he estimates that all officials in charge of children's homes will be qualified.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The target date for all officers in charge of local authority maintained and controlled residential homes for children to be qualified to CQSW/CSS/DipSW standard is 1995-96. The special training initiative being introduced from 1992-93 as part of the Department's training support programme will provide significant help to local authorities in achieving this aim. It will also be necessary for local authorities to have regard to appropriate management and personnel policies, paying particular attention to recruitment and retention issues.

Hospitals (Disclosure of Information)

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reasons employees of the Special Hospital Service are asked to sign a form on disclosure of information, promising they will not divulge any information about the business of the hospital.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a matter for the Special Hospitals Service Authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Dr. David Edmond, the chairman of the authority, for details.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what written undertakings concerning the Official Secrets Act 1989 are required from employees of the Special Hospital Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in which hospitals, other than those in the Special Hospital Service, nurses are required to sign a form headed "disclosure of information".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Any such requirement would be a matter for the appropriate health authority.

Senile Dementia

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the degree to which the City and Hackney health authority's practices for discharging patients suffering from senile dementia to private care homes is consistent with his Department's guidelines on such procedures.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have asked the NHS management executive to investigate this matter urgently. In the light of its inquiries an assessment will be made of the extent to which current arrangements are satisfactory. We have asked the chief executive to ensure that, any necessary, and appropriate remedial action is taken.

Child Health

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district health authority and for each of the last five years, the number of health visitors per 1,000 children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The table gives the information requested for 1986 and 1990 only. Figures for all the years requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

District health authorities have regard to skill mix, recruitment and training when planning their manpower levels. This is kept under review.

Health visitors per 1,000 children under 16

	1986	1990
Northern Regional Health Authority		
District Health Authority		
Hartlepool	1·1	1·7
North Tees	0·8	1·0
South Tees	0·9	1·3
East Cumbria	1·0	1·0
South Cumbria	1·1	1·1
West Cumbria	1·1	1·0
Darlington	1·0	1·1
Durham	0·9	0·6
North West Durham	1·2	1·3
South West Durham	1·1	1·1
Northumberland	1·2	1·2
Gateshead	1·3	1·1
Newcastle	1·5	1·2
North Tyneside	1·2	1·2
South Tyneside	1·0	1·1
Sunderland	1·1	1·2
Total	1·1	1·1
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority		
Hull	0·7	0·7
East Yorkshire	1·1	1·1
Grimsby	0·8	1·0
Scunthorpe	0·9	1·0
Northallerton	1·2	0·9
York	1·0	1·0
Scarborough	1·2	1·3
Harrogate	0·9	1·1
Bradford	1·0	1·1
Airedale	1·0	1·1
Calderdale	1·2	1·3
Huddersfield	1·1	1·2
Dewsbury	0·9	1·2
Leeds Western	1·0	1·2
Leeds Eastern	1·0	1·2
Wakefield	0·9	1·3
Pontefract	1·0	1·1
Total	1·0	1·1
Trent Regional Health Authority		
North Derbyshire	1·1	1·1
South Derbyshire	0·8	1·0
Leicestershire	1·0	1·1
North Lincolnshire	1·0	0·9
South Lincolnshire	1·0	0·9
Bassetlaw	0·9	1·0
Central Nottinghamshire	1·1	1·1
Nottingham	1·1	1·2
Barnsley	1·0	1·2
Doncaster	1·0	1·0
Rotherham	1·0	1·3
Sheffield	1·1	1·1
Total	1·0	1·1
East Anglian Regional Health Authority		
Cambridge	1·1	0·8
Peterborough	0·9	0·8
West Suffolk	0·9	0·9
East Suffolk	0·9	0·9
Norwich	0·9	0·9
Great Yarmouth and Waveney	0·9	0·9
West Norfolk and Wisbech	0·9	0·9
Huntingdon	0·8	0·7
Total	0·9	0·9

	1986	1990
North West Thames Regional Health Authority		
North Bedfordshire	1·0	1·1
South Bedfordshire	1·0	1·1
North Hertfordshire	1·0	1·1
East Hertfordshire	0·9	1·2
North West Hertfordshire	0·9	0·9
South West Hertfordshire	1·0	0·9
Barnet	1·2	1·0
Harrow	1·2	1·2
Hillingdon	1·1	0·7
Hounslow and Spelthorne	1·2	1·3
Ealing	1·4	1·4
Brent	1·1	—
Paddington and North Kensington	2·3	—
Riverside	1·9	1·7
Parkside	—	1·0
Total	1·2	1·1
North East Thames Regional Health Authority		
Basildon and Thurrock	0·7	0·8
Mid Essex	0·8	0·8
North East Essex	1·0	1·0
West Essex	0·9	0·8
Southend	0·8	0·9
Barking, Havering and Brentwood	0·7	0·7
Hampstead	2·0	1·5
Bloomsbury	2·0	2·7
Islington	1·3	1·2
City and Hackney	1·3	1·2
Newham	0·8	1·2
Tower Hamlets	1·8	1·7
Enfield	0·8	0·6
Haringey	1·1	1·1
Redbridge	0·9	0·8
Waltham Forest	0·8	1·1
Total	1·0	1·0
South East Thames Regional Health Authority		
Brighton	1·4	0·7
Eastbourne	1·4	1·5
Hastings	1·2	0·9
South East Kent	1·2	1·0
Canterbury and Thanet	0·9	0·9
Dartford and Gravesham	1·2	1·2
Maidstone	0·9	1·0
Medway	0·9	0·7
Tunbridge Wells	0·9	1·1
Bexley	1·1	1·3
Greenwich	1·1	1·1
Bromley	1·2	1·1
West Lambeth	1·7	1·4
Camberwell	1·3	0·8
Lewisham and North Southwark	1·6	1·4
Total	1·2	1·0
South West Thames Regional Health Authority		
North West Surrey	1·1	1·2
West Surrey and North East Hants	1·1	1·2
South West Surrey	1·0	1·1
Mid Surrey	1·3	1·2
East Surrey	1·2	1·1
Chichester	1·1	1·1
Mid Downs	1·1	1·1
Worthing	1·1	1·1
Croydon	0·9	1·1
Kingston and Esher	1·3	1·0
Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton	1·5	1·3
Wandsworth	1·1	1·6
Merton and Sutton	1·1	1·1
Total	1·1	1·2
Wessex Regional Health Authority		
East Dorset	1·0	1·2

	1986	1990
West Dorset	1·1	1·1
Portsmouth and South East Hants	1·0	1·1
South West Hampshire and South	1·0	1·2
Winchester	1·3	0·9
Basingstoke	1·1	1·1
Salisbury	1·5	1·4
Swindon	1·0	1·0
Bath	1·1	1·1
Isle of Wight	1·3	1·2
Total	1·1	1·1
Oxford Regional Health Authority		
East Berkshire	1·1	0·9
West Berkshire	1·0	1·1
Aylesbury	1·2	1·1
Wycombe	1·2	1·1
Milton Keynes	1·0	1·2
Kettering	1·0	1·0
Northampton	1·0	0·9
Oxfordshire	1·0	1·1
Total	1·1	1·0
South Western Regional Health Authority		
Bristol and Weston	1·2	1·6
Frenchay	1·1	1·1
Southmead	1·1	1·2
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1·1	1·1
Exeter	1·1	0·9
North Devon	1·0	0·9
Plymouth	1·1	1·1
Torbay	1·1	0·9
Cheltenham and District	1·1	1·1
Gloucester	1·1	1·1
Somerset	1·2	1·0
Total	1·1	1·1
West Midlands Regional Health Authority		
Bromsgrove and Redditch	0·9	1·0
Herefordshire	1·0	1·1
Kidderminster and District	1·5	1·4
Worcester and District	1·1	1·0
Shropshire	1·2	1·2
Mid Staffordshire	0·9	0·9
North Staffordshire	1·1	1·0
South East Staffordshire	0·9	0·9
Rugby	1·1	1·2
North Warwickshire	1·1	1·1
South Warwickshire	1·0	1·1
Central Birmingham	1·0	1·3
East Birmingham	0·8	0·8
North Birmingham	1·1	1·1
South Birmingham	1·0	1·0
West Birmingham	1·0	0·9
Coventry	0·9	0·8
Dudley	1·0	1·2
Sandwell	1·0	1·1
Solihull	0·9	0·9
Walsall	1·2	0·9
Wolverhampton	1·1	1·1
Total	1·0	1·0
Mersey Regional Health Authority		
Chester	1·0	1·2
Crewe	0·7	0·8
Halton	0·9	0·9
Macclesfield	1·0	0·9
Warrington	0·9	1·0
Liverpool	1·1	1·0
St. Helens and Knowsley	0·9	1·1
Southport and Formby	1·2	1·2
South Sefton	1·2	1·2
Wirral	1·0	1·0
Total	1·0	1·0

	1986	1990
North Western Regional Health Authority		
Lancaster	1·5	1·4
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	1·6	1·6
Preston	1·6	1·5
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble	1·4	1·4
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	1·4	1·3
West Lancashire	1·5	1·6
Chorley and South Ribble	1·3	1·3
Bolton	1·5	1·3
Bury	1·2	1·2
North Manchester	1·8	1·4
Central Manchester	1·5	1·7
South Manchester	1·4	1·2
Oldham	1·4	1·2
Rochdale	1·2	1·2
Salford	1·2	1·4
Stockport	1·4	1·3
Tameside and Glossop	1·1	1·1
Trafford	1·5	1·4
Wigan	1·4	1·5
Total	1·4	1·4
England Total	1·1	1·1

Notes:
1. Ratios calculated using:
   (a) Midyear population estimates
   (b) Health Visitor statistics at 30 September each year
2. Source of figures:
   (a) Population figures from SM14D (obtained from OPCS)
   (b) Health Visitors from annual non-medical manpower census (SM13B)
3. Health Visitors figures relate to whole-time equivalents
4. Certain Districts within N W Thames have been reorganised and figures for these Districts are not available on a comparable basis
5. Health Visitors are defined by Occupation Code, not by Payscale, and the former is known to be less accurate than the latter. Apparent changes in the ratio can be due to changes in coding accuracy by Health Authorities rather than actual changes in numbers of Health Visitors. This factor is believed to explain apparent changes within South East Thames.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities have appointed consultant community paediatricians; and if he will list those that have and those which have not.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* This information is not collected centrally. The British Paediatric Association undertook a census of medical staff in child health in 1990 which showed that, among the districts which responded, 100 had by then appointed one or more consultant paediatricians community child health (CPCCH).

Paediatrics

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to require those district health authorities which have not appointed consultant community paediatricians to do so.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* There has been steady growth in the number of consultant paediatricians community child health (CPCCHs) since the establishment of these posts was recommended in the Court report in 1976. The census undertaken by the British Paediatric Association in 1990 showed there were 139 CPCCHs in post in England.

Individual consultant appointments are a matter for health authorities and NHS trusts to decide in the light of local needs consistent with policies agreed between health departments and the profession for the general development of the medical staff career structure.

A joint working party comprising representatives of the British Medical Association, the Conference of Royal Colleges and health departments is considering the unification of the career structures for medical staff in hospital and community child health. In an interim report about to be published, the joint working party will be defining the medical staffing needs of an integrated child health service and endorsing the key role that the CPCCH has in the leadership of the community element of this service.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Tax and National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons in Wales and what proportion of the population would be affected, and to what extent, if the combined burden of tax and national insurance contributions were to be increased by 19 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: I regret the information requested is not available separately for Wales.

Sick and Disabled People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been spent on benefits for sick and disabled people for the last three years *(a)* in total and *(b)* by benefit; and what is the intended expenditure for the next two years (i) in total and (ii) by benefit.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

	1988-89 outturn £ million	*1989-90 outturn* £ million	*1990-91 estimated outturn* £ million	*1991-92 plans* £ million	*1992-93 plans* £ million
Sickness Benefit	192	204	218	240	253
Statutory sick pay	898	949	928	728	758
Invalidity Benefit[1]	3,371	3,852	4,474	5,327	5,861
Industrial Disablement Benefit	451	470	510	547	551
Other industrial injuries benefits	4	4	4	4	4
War Pension	421	442	482	525	537
Attendance Allowance	1,003	1,159	1,406	1,708	1,204
Invalid Care Allowance	173	184	213	248	282
Severe Disablement Allowance	316	346	433	578	612
Mobility Allowance	675	769	897	1,060	[2] 103
Disability Living Allowance[3]	—	—	—	—	1,857
Disability Working Allowance	—	—	—	—	82
Income Support	792	921	1,076	1,247	1,439
Social Fund	23	20	25	25	26
Housing/Community Charge Benefit[4]	278	451	638	702	817
TOTAL	8,597	9,771	11,304	12,939	14,386

[1] Includes Christmas bonus.
[2] Figure relates to outstanding payments of Mobility Allowance, due prior to April 1992.
[3] From April 1992 Disability Living Allowance will replace Mobility Allowance, and for those disabled before 65, Attendance Allowance.
[4] Includes rates rebates for 1988-89 and 1989-90, community charge rebate for 1989-90 and community charge benefit for the years 1990-91 onwards.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the figures *(a)* by region and *(b)* nationally for each year from 1987 onwards of the number of people applying for (i) mobility allowances and (ii) attendance allowances; and the actual numbers granted in each case.

Mr. Scott: Regional figures are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Available national figures are given in the table:

Year	*AA initial and subsequent claims[1] (rounded thousands)* *Number received*	*Awards*	*MobA initial and subsequent claims[1] (rounded thousands)* *Number received*	*Awards*
1987	320	209	182	92
1988	362	208	200	92
1989	365	229	200	93
1990	409	274	198	130
1991	408	348	231	109

[1] Claims received in any year are not necessarily processed in that same year. Figures for renewals are not included.

Social Fund

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications to the social fund from applicants in London SE1 and London SE16 were *(a)* made and *(b)* successful between 1 July 1991 and 31 December 1991.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Pensions

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will reconsider the rules governing the distribution of pension surpluses in order to protect the rights of employees; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Measures to protect the members of occupational pension schemes were included in the Social Security Act 1990. One of these came into effect from 17 August 1990 and prevents payments being made from a pension scheme to the employer unless members are guaranteed annual increases in their pensions in line with prices, up to 5 per cent. A further measure will, when implemented, require final salary pension schemes to pay indexed pension increases up to a maximum of 5 per cent. a year. This limited price indexation provision will apply to all such schemes in respect of future service, and in respect of past service to schemes with a surplus.

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the total amount of pension surpluses held by companies with pension funds.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to assess the total amount of surpluses on a common basis at any given date as schemes produce valuations at different times and on different methods and assumptions.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on statutory sick pay in each of the last three years; and how much is forecast to be spent for the current year, and for 1992-93, in real terms.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is

[1]*£ million at 1991-92 prices*

Year	[2]*Statutory Sick Pay*
1988-89	1,110
1989-90	1,102
1990-91	993
1991-92	728
1992-93	725

[1]Revalued by the GDP deflator.
[2]Figures represent reimbursements to employers, which reduced from 100 per cent. to 80 per cent. from April 1991.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the policy of the Child Support Agency on demanding maintenance payments from former husbands regardless of whether a former wife has asked for such payments or whether a court has imposed a maintenance order, in cases where the former wife is claiming income support.

Mr. Jack: From April 1993 the Child Support Agency will take over from the courts the main responsibility for obtaining maintenance for children. It will provide a service for use by all families for whom child maintenance is an issue whether they are on benefit or not. Where the parent with care of a child claims income support, family credit or disability living allowance, provisions in the Child Support Act 1991 mean that she will be expected to authorise the Child Support Agency to take maintenance action for her child. The agency will not act without such authorisation. Experience shows that most parents wish to co-operate in arranging financial support for the benefit of their children. It is very much in the child's interest that both parents should do what they can to support their child.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in respect of cold weather payments *(a)* on how many occasions payments have been made in advance of predicted cold weather, *(b)* how much has been paid, *(c)* in which areas payments have been made and *(d)* what information he has received on the likely rate of error in predictions of cold weather sufficient to trigger payments.

Mr. Scott: Cold weather periods have been forecast at 23 weather stations so far this winter. To date, a total of £8,548,026 has been paid out on cold weather payments, for all types of trigger, and further payments will be sent out this week. For details of stations which triggered up to 14 December I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) on 20 December at columns *373-4*. The use of forecasts is one of several improvements made in 1991 to the cold weather payments scheme. Forecasting can never be 100 per cent. accurate, but the retrospective trigger mechanism remains in place to pick up any cold spells which actually occur but were not forecast. The new elements of the scheme are being kept under review in order to ensure the best possible advice is provided by the Meteorological Office. The weather stations and postcode districts affected by the forecast triggers which have occurred since 14 December are:

Eskdalemuir
Coningsby
Finningley
Waddington
Bedford
Cwmbargoed
Easthampstead
Honington
Lyneham
Trawsfynydd
Wyton
Gatwick
Herstmonceux
Wattisham
Birmingham
Brize Norton

Water Rates

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what element of the income support calculation relates to water rates; and how this is determined.

Miss Widdecombe: There is no separate element for water rates in income support payments. Water is one of many items of expenditure which vary. The general movement of prices is reflected in the uprating index applied to income support, and the other income-related benefits.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced that the uprating index used for the income-related benefits has been modified to include water

rates, certain miscellaneous housing costs and, 1992-93 benefit only, 20 per cent. of the community charge to which claimants will be liable, until the end of March 1993.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 28 January 1992.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

County Courts

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the efficiency of the county court system.

The Attorney-General: Most areas of county court work are subject to targets which are regularly monitored. The Government are seeking to continue to streamline the work of the county courts through a programme of procedural improvements and the introduction of computer technology.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General how much has been spent on legal aid fees in cases before the county court since 1980.

The Attorney-General: Between April 1980 and March 1991, £1·038 billion of gross payments were made in respect of legal aid work carried out in county court cases. Information of expenditure in each financial year is contained in the legal aid annual reports which are laid before Parliament each year and are available in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Community Charge

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes in the law he proposes to introduce to facilitate the consideration by magistrates courts of applications for liability orders in community charge proceedings.

Mr. Heseltine: I have been asked to reply.

We intend to bring forward at the earliest opportunity amendments to the Local Government Finance Bill, currently in another place, making provisions which will put beyond any doubt that authorities may present computer evidence in support of applications for liability orders in magistrates courts. These will cover enforcement of the community charge, the non-domestic rate and, in future, the council tax. We are determined that authorities should be given every assistance in recovering tax and charges from those who fail to pay their dues.

Fire Regulations

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has had about the inhibition of social functions in village halls by the administration of fire regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: None. No fire regulations apply specifically to village halls, but public music and dancing and similar entertainments cannot be provided except in accordance with the terms of a licence granted by the district council under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 or in Greater London by the London borough council under the London Government Act 1963. The purpose of this licensing system is to ensure, among other things, that places used for entertainment—and this includes village halls—have adequate safety standards.

The fire authority's role is to advise the licensing authority on the requirements that it considers necessary for the premises, in relation to the event in question.

Guidance on fire safety matters in smaller premises, including village halls, is included within the Home Department's publication "Guide to Fire Precautions in Existing Places of Entertainment and Like Premises". Chapter 12, which includes a section on village halls, was drawn up in consultation with the Village Halls Forum, a group formed from representatives from village hall committees and organisations concerned with village halls.

Visitors' Permits

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria used to determine the lengths of stay permitted to temporary visitors from the Indian sub-continent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The criteria are the same as for any other visitor and are set out in paragraphs 22 to 25 and 104 to 106 of the "Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules"—HC 251, as amended by HC 670—a copy of which is in the Library.

Genetic Fingerprinting

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in the use of genetic fingerprinting for crime detection; what facilities are at present available; and when this technique will be available for the use of all police forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This has been passed to the Director General of the Forensic Science Service who will be replying shortly. A copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

Control and Restraint

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each prison establishment, on how many occasions three-officer teams have been deployed under control and restraint 1 in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Mrs. Rumbold: Control and restraint 1 techniques enable prison officers to deal effectively with limited incidents of violence, which require the restraint of individual prisoners either by individual officers or by three-officer teams with the minimum risk of injury to prisoners or staff.

Information is not collected in the form requested.

George Blake

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek the return of escaped convict George Blake to this country; and if he will make a statement on his policy relating to escaped convicts who could be repatriated to continue their sentence.

Mr. John Patten: It is our policy to seek the extradition of fugitives from countries with which we have extradition arrangements. However, as there is no extradition treaty between the United Kingdom and the Russian federation, we are not in a position to set extradition proceedings in motion. Were there to be an extradition treaty, it would be for the authorities in the other state to determine whether any particular case would fall within the scope of the treaty.

Pornographic Disks

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures his Department intends to take against retailers and libraries to require them to treat pornographic disks as adult publications only;

(2) what measures his Department intends to take to draw parents', publishers', retailers', and librarians' attention to the problem of access to pornographic disks for children;

(3) what measures his Department is to take against the existing open access of children to pornographic computer disks;

(4) if he will introduce legislation to make it illegal for people knowingly *(a)* to publish an advertisement for computer disks which contain illegal pornography and *(b)* sell magazines which contain advertisements for illegal pornography on computer disks.

Mr. John Patten: The Government entirely share my hon. Friend's concern about the use of computer technology to store and transmit pornographic material. The criminal law relating to obscenity already applies to such material and there are also legal safeguards against offensive material being sent over public telecommunications systems.

I am advised that the practical issue is therefore not primarily one of inadequate legislation, but of enforcement and obtaining evidence sufficient to bring proceedings. Both the Metropolitan police obscene publications branch and other police forces are very aware of this problem and are monitoring the situation closely.

The Government also recognise the well-founded concern about the exposure of children to objectionable material, whatever its form. However this is also a question of parental responsibility and we encourage suppliers and parents to be particularly conscientious in satisfying themselves that children are not obtaining material which is obviously unsuitable.

As far as those who offer to supply obscene material in magazines or elsewhere are concerned, their actions are already prohibited under the Obscene Publications Act. Although I cannot give an authoritative interpretation on a point of law, it is possible that a publisher who knowingly assisted in this by accepting an advertisement could be held to be guilty of aiding and abetting the offence.

Television (Violence)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will outline the steps currently undertaken by his Department to monitor the level of incidence of violent conduct shown on television.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Broadcasting Act 1990, it is for the broadcasting regulatory authorities—the BBC board of governors, the Independent Television Commission and S4C—to monitor the compliance of television programmes with the statutory requirements and codes of guidance which have been issued to broadcasters about violence on television. In addition the Broadcasting Standards Council has been established to reinforce and monitor programme standards in relation to violence, among other things.

Leicestershire Police

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about police manpower in Leicestershire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Leicestershire constabulary had 1,823 police officers and 683 civilian staff at the end of October 1991, which is an increase in actual strength of 443—122 police officers and 321 civilians—since May 1979. The authorised establishment of the force is 1,827, an increase of 121 posts since 1979. My right hon. Friend announced on 28 November a futher increase of 26 police posts with effect from 1 April 1992.

Immigration and Nationality Registry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current backlog at the registry in the immigration and nationality department; and what are the current numbers of outstanding applications in each division.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: At the beginning of January the backlog in the immigration and nationality department registry was 29,842 and the number of outstanding applications in the caseworking divisions was as follows:

	Number
General immigration casework	21,208
Asylum and related casework	68,500
Nationality	51,723

Mr. Younus Patel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of the detention of Mr. Younus Patel of 55 Park Vale road, Leicester, in Welford Road prison, Leicester.

Mrs. Rumbold: Individual costs of detention are not kept separately. The daily average cost of keeping a prisoner in Leicester prison in 1990-91, the latest period for which figures are available, was £65·14. On this basis the cost of Mr. Patel's detention would be £13,810.

Extradition

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if Parliament will be required to approve the terms of any extradition treaty concluded between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of India;

(2) under the extradition treaty now being negotiated by Her Majesty's Government and India, what safeguards will be included to provide proper and effective safeguards for individuals to appeal against extradition applications by India;

(3) if he will stop negotiations with the Government of India on an extradition treaty in view of widespread concern, about the extent of human rights violations in India; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Extradition arrangements already apply to India under the Commonwealth extradition scheme. When I was in India earlier this month, I agreed with the Indian Government that our respective officials should meet to discuss the possibility of concluding a formal treaty. Indian officials will be visiting the United Kingdom in February. Any extradition arrangements, whether by treaty or under the Commonwealth scheme, have to comply with the safeguards including rights of appeal provided in the Extradition Act 1989, and with provisions in that Act as regards bringing new arrangements into force.

Extradition

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information the British authorities require from foreign countries seeking extradition of a British national.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* For extradition under the terms of the European convention on extradition, the request must satisfy the provisions of section 7(2) of the Extradition Act 1989.

Requests from other foreign countries with which we have bilateral treaties are subject to the requirements of paragraphs 7(1) and (2) of schedule 1 to the Act. In all cases the nationality of the fugitive is irrelevant.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the occasions during the last 10 years when a British national has been extradited from the United Kingdom to a foreign country with which Britain has no extradition treaty.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* No person of any nationality has been so extradited.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on requests for the extradition of British nationals from the United Kingdom to countries with which Britain has no extradition agreement, where international law grants the British authorities jurisdiction.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* If such a request were received, the question whether the interests of justice would best be served by extradition or domestic prosecution would be decided in the light of all relevant circumstances.

Firearms

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total number of recorded crimes involving the use of firearms in each of the past 10 years in *(a)* the Greater Manchester police authority area, and *(b)* England and Wales.

Mr. John Patten: Statistics of the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have been used are published by police force area in table S3.1(A) of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales, Supplementary tables". The most recent issue, for 1989, gives figures for each year between 1979 and 1989. A copy of this publication is held in the Library.

Police Batons

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet representatives of the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss the use of the American side-handled baton; and if he will evaluate the effectiveness of this baton.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. The procurement of equipment is the responsibility of chief officers. We have offered to arrange for a scientific evaluation of the side-handled baton if chief officers request it.

Immigration

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Filipino and Thai women who have married British citizens are at present waiting for the necessary visas to join their husbands; and what is the average length of time they have to wait before receiving the visa.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

A total of 27 Filipino and 98 Thai women married to British citizens are waiting for the necessary visas to join their husbands. The current waiting time for interview is nine weeks in Manila and eight weeks in Bangkok. Successful applicants normally receive their visas on the day of interview.

ENVIRONMENT

Polluters (Prosecutions)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many prosecutions have been brought by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on polluting companies since the passage of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and what individual fines were levied in each year.

Mr. Trippier: The Environmental Protection Act 1990 received Royal Assent on 1 November 1990. Since then, six prosecutions have been concluded by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, all successfully. The fines were as follows:

£300 with	£700 costs
£300 with	£2,100 costs
£500 with	£4,061 costs
£800 with	£6,502 costs
£3,000 with	£1,395 costs
£7,500 with	£6,140 costs

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Heseltine: Coopers and Lybrand has been used for the following projects since 1989:

Area Economic Study: Basingstoke
Buying Agency: Employment agreement clauses
Crown Suppliers: Assignment of vehicle hire contracts
Crown Suppliers: Privatisation
Crown Suppliers: Senior appointments remuneration for the Buying Agency

Estate Action Schemes evaluation
Housing Corporation: Audit
Litter Baseline survey
National Monument Record marketing strategy
Property Holdings: Government Car Service
Property Holdings: Interdepartmental Despatch Service
Property Holdings: Security equipment and furniture stores
PSA Services: Accounts Receivable system
PSA Services: Consultants database
PSA Services: Personnel consultancy
PSA Services: Plus Plan consolidation
PSA Services: Proposed privatisation
PSA Services: Repayment invoicing system
PSA Services: Report writing system
PSA Services: Strategic accounting system
Tyne and Wear Development Corporation: Audit
Uniface: Consultancy

It is not our policy to reveal the cost of individual contracts.

Appeals Tribunals

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the cost to the Exchequer so far of valuation and community charge tribunals; what is the number of outstanding appeals; what is the estimated cost to the Exchequer of hearing the outstanding non-domestic rating appeals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Valuation and community charge tribunals came into being on 1 May 1989, replacing local valuation panels. The cost of the 56 VCCTs in England and their predecessors since 1989-90 is as follows:

	£ million
1989-90	9·8
1990-91	7·6
1991-92	[1]9·2

[1]estimated.

The relatively high 1989-90 figure includes capital expenditure—in particular on computer hardware—in preparation for handling appeals against the 1990 rating list and the community charge.

At the end of 1991, VCCTs in England had outstanding nearly 600,000 appeals, including non-domestic rating and community charge cases. The following amounts have been provided for English VCCTs in the Government's spending plans:

	£ million
1992-93	15·9
1993-94	9·5
1994-95	9·8

These amounts relate to the full costs of VCCTs including all appeal work, and it is not possible to provide separate figures in respect of rating appeals only. In particular, VCCTs will have jurisdiction over certain classes of appeal concerning the council tax to be introduced from 1993. In preparation for this, the figures for 1991-92 and 1992-93 include £0·5 million and £6·8 million respectively for new computer hardware and applications to enable the efficient processing of council tax appeals.

Wheal Jane Mine

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department is taking to terminate the flow of contaminated water from the abandoned Wheal Jane mine, Cornwall; if he will send a Minister to the area without delay; if he will receive a deputation from Cornwall county council; and if he will make a statement as to how the incident was enabled to arise.

Mr. Baldry: I met representatives from Carrick district council on 21 January, and I visited Cornwall on 23 January to see the work which is currently being carried out to treat the discharge from Wheal Jane. I was impressed by the effort which the National Rivers Authority has put into monitoring since the middle of last year, into remedial treatment in recent months, and into the development of medium and long-term arrangements for treating the discharge. Efforts to prevent the discharge of untreated water failed as a result of an unexpected collapse in the area of the Nangiles adit. I met Councillor David Roberts, chairman of Cornwall county council, on 23 January.

Parliamentary Works Office Staff

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the grades of staff employed by the Parliamentary Works Office who are required to clock in and clock out at the start and finish of their day's work.

Mr. Yeo: Only non-industrial staff participating in the flexitime arrangements are required to clock in and out. Industrial grades enter manually the time of their arrival and depature on the work dockets.

Noise Insulation

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to ensure that local authorities test the standards of noise insulation in new residential buildings.

Mr. Yeo: On 10 December last year revised building regulations were laid before Parliament which from 1 June 1992 will improve the existing requirements for sound insulation in new dwellings and extend these to flat conversions. Practical problems for the local authority and the builder would not in my view justify sound testing of all new and converted residential properties. The requirements of the building regulations are met by the builder undertaking forms of construction which have been shown to perform satisfactorily under test conditions.

Ley Holdings Ltd.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the application of Ley Rubber Ltd., Liverpool, to change the use of its property at 62 Bridgewater street, was submitted to the Merseyside development corporation; and when a decision will be reached.

Mr. Yeo: The application of Ley Holdings Ltd., Liverpool to change the use of property at 62 Bridgewater street was submitted to the Merseyside development corporation on 9 January 1992. The development corporation expects to decide the application at its board meeting on 13 February 1992.

West Yorkshire Fire Authority

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to announce the standard spending assessment for the West Yorkshire fire authority; and what account, in reaching his decision, has been taken of special factors applying to fire visits in West Yorkshire explained to him by the delegation he met on 16 January.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State laid the Revenue Support Grant Report (England) 1992-93 and associated reports before the House last Friday 24 January. Copies of the reports, together with a table showing the standard spending assessments—SSAs—and grant entitlement of each authority were sent to all authorities on the same day, and have been placed in the Library and Vote Office.

Before taking his decisions on the settlement, my right hon. Friend carefully considered all the representations and comments which had been made to him, including those made by members of a delegation from West Yorkshire fire authority when they came to see me on 16 January. Having considered all the representations and comments made to him, he decided to adopt his proposed methodology for the fire component of SSAs. The SSA for the West Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority for 1992-93 is £48·749 million, an increase of 8·2 per cent. on 1991-92, and as a result of changes in underlying data £12,000 greater than the provisional SSA proposed on 26 November.

Devonport Secondary School

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce his decision on the application by Devon county council for consent under section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 to transfer the site and buildings of Devonport secondary school to the diocesan education committee.

Sir George Young: Within the next few days. I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state for each year since 1978-79 the Government's settlement for local authority personal social services and the actual expenditure by local authorities on personal social services for each year.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

Personal Social Services

£ million

	Grant related expenditure[1] control total	*Expenditure[2]*
1982-83	1,943	n.a.
1983-84	2,085	n.a.
1984-85	2,205	n.a.
1985-86	2,366	n.a.
1986-87	2,553	n.a.
1987-88	2,756	n.a.
1988-89	2,913	n.a.
1989-90	3,269	n.a.
	SSA Control Total	*Expenditure[3]*
1990-91	3,592	4,119
1991-92	4,418	4,521

[1] Information on grant related expenditure control totals is not available for years prior to 1982-83.

[2] It is not possible to construct comparable figures for outturn on the basis of available returns from local authorities.

[3] Net Revenue Expenditure to compare with SSA.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons he decided to exclude homelessness of children and adults, the number of elderly and disabled persons from ethnic minority groups, information about the prevalence of disability in the population from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys disability survey, and information about the prevalence of mental illness, from the calculation of standard spending assessment for local authority personal social services.

Mr. Key: The selection of indicators included in the social services standard spending assessments is based on the careful consideration of research evidence, much of it from independent sources, and extensive discussion with local authority representatives. The information referred to has formed part of these considerations, but in most cases is not available on a reliable and consistent basis for all local authorities.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average annual rate of growth allowed to the local authority personal social services between 1978-79 and 1988-89.

Mr. Key: The average annual rate of growth in the total allowance for revenue spending on personal social services within the rate support grant settlements between 1982-83 and 1988-89 was 7 per cent. Information is not available for years prior to 1982-83. It is for local authorities to decide their own priorities between spending on various services.

Funding

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which organisations currently receive Government funding under section 73 of the Housing Act 1985; how much money each organisation receives; and for what nature of the services the money is provided.

Mr. Yeo: I will arrange for this information to be placed in the Library.

Planning

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of time which companies applying for planning permission to the Merseyside development corporation have to wait; and whether minor non-contentious planning decisions are delegated to development corporation officials.

Mr. Yeo: The measure "average length of time" is not generally used for assessing development control decisions on planning applications. The Department of the Environment measures the proportion of applications determined within eight weeks of submission. In 1990, 59 per cent. of the applications determined by the Merseyside

development corporation were within eight weeks. This increased to 60 per cent. for the first three quarters of 1991, the most up-to-date information available.

Legal counsel's advice to the corporation is that it does not have the power to delegate minor, non-contentious planning decisions to officials.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to sell Property Services Agency Projects by single tender.

Mr. Yeo: There is no truth in the rumours that PSA Projects is about to be sold by single tender. A prospective purchaser has indicated that an unsolicited bid may be made for Projects shortly. If that happens careful consideration will be given to the merits of launching a sale competition in the near future. In considering the sale timetable I will want to take into account the need to ensure adequate staff consultation and competition.

Landfill Sites

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the terms of reference of the study commissioned by his Department into the blighting effects on home owners of landfill gas sites; when this study will be completed; and whether it will be published.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The terms of reference are to examine examples of blight and public concern which have already occurred in relation to specific contaminated sites, including gassing landfills; and to identify the nature and form of information and guidance that will be required.

A draft report has just been received by the Department. The findings of the study will be used in preparing a programme of information and publicity for the general public, and in guidance for local authorities.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total expenditure of local authorities, in England and Wales, in each year since 1979, expressed in *(a)* current prices and *(b)* 1991 prices.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The available information is as follows:

Local Authority Revenue Expenditure England
Total Expenditure

£ million

	Cash	*1991-92 Prices*
1981-82	18,171	32,558
1982-83	19,737	33,014
1983-84	20,809	33,266
1984-85	21,312	32,447
1985-86	21,661	31,252
1986-87	23,760	33,190
1987-88	25,686	34,029
1988-89	27,667	34,200
1989-90	29,404	34,133
	Net Revenue Expenditure	
1990-91	33,142	35,462
1991-92	36,256	36,256

Notes:
1. Total Expenditure 1981-82 to 1989-90 and Net Revenue Expenditure 1990-91 to 1991-92 are not directly comparable as they derive from two different financial systems.
2. Information relating to Welsh Authorities is a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount raised in 1990-91 through the uniform business rate in Greater London and the expected amount in 1991-92; and what amounts in global and percentage terms were made available to London boroughs, expressed *(a)* overall and *(b)* by borough.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

	1990-91			*1991-92*		
	Final contribution to pool[1] *(£ million)*	*Receipts from pool (£ million)*	*Receipts as a percentage of contribution (Per cent.)*	*Provisional contribution to pool (£ million)*	*Receipts from pool (£ million)*	*Receipts as a percentage of contribution (Per cent.)*
City of London	537·8	0·8	0	603·7	1·3	0
Camden	174·0	38·0	22	213·7	46·1	22
Greenwich	29·0	45·4	157	32·6	54·8	168
Hackney	51·8	38·3	74	64·6	45·9	71
Hammersmith and Fulham	51·5	34·6	67	71·3	41·8	59
Islington	85·5	36·5	43	107·7	44·6	41
Kensington and Chelsea	46·1	24·2	52	66·4	37·0	56
Lambeth	51·1	50·5	99	60·9	60·2	99
Lewisham	22·8	50·0	219	26·1	58·3	223
Southwark	84·3	48·3	57	102·4	57·8	56
Tower Hamlets	75·7	33·0	44	90·8	41·9	46
Wandsworth	29·9	60·4	202	42·5	69·1	163
Westminster	487·0	39·5	8	601·4	47·4	8
Barking and Dagenham	29·1	32·0	110	32·1	38·5	120
Barnet	45·0	66·2	147	57·1	77·9	136
Bexley	25·0	48·2	193	31·1	58·2	187
Brent	68·4	56·7	83	77·5	67·1	87
Bromley	31·5	67·8	215	40·2	79·9	199
Croydon	57·3	69·5	121	67·9	84·3	124
Ealing	69·2	61·1	88	84·9	72·5	85
Enfield	47·3	57·3	121	54·7	70·5	129
Haringey	47·1	41·3	88	49·0	52·7	108
Harrow	28·5	44·0	154	35·1	53·0	151
Havering	29·3	51·8	177	34·9	62·0	177

	1990-91			1991-92		
	Final contribution to pool[1] (£ million)	Receipts from pool (£ million)	Receipts as a percentage of contribution (Per cent.)	Provisional contribution to pool (£ million)	Receipts from pool (£ million)	Receipts as a percentage of contribution (Per cent.)
Hillingdon	92·4	51·3	56	116·7	61·6	53
Hounslow	90·3	45·1	50	105·0	53·5	51
Kingston	30·3	29·9	99	37·0	35·0	95
Merton	27·5	38·2	139	33·0	46·1	140
Newham	50·1	46·7	93	55·9	55·5	99
Redbridge	20·8	50·3	242	26·8	60·5	226
Richmond	28·4	36·1	127	34·0	43·8	129
Sutton	25·9	37·6	145	30·9	44·4	144
Waltham Forest	27·4	46·9	171	32·9	56·0	170
All Greater London	2,597·6	1,477·4	57	3,120·9	1,779·5	57

[1] These are local authorities' own calculations of the final contribution to the non-domestic rates pool. The Secretary of State is still considering the auditors reports for some of these authorities.

In addition to the receipts from the pool, the City of London budgeted to receive £25 million in 1990-91 and £30 million in 1991-92 from the locally determined rate.

The total amount raised from non-domestic rates includes payments by properties on the central and Crown lists direct to the pool. These amounts are not available broken down by area. The total amount available for distribution from the pool in 1990-91 was £10·4 billion and in 1991-92 £12·4 billion. This includes £1·6 billion in respect of properties on central and Crown lists in each year.

Contributions to the pool and payments out of the pool may not balance within the year concerned. Any excess amounts in the pool at the end of the year are carried forward and made available for distribution in the following year.

Revenue support grant is paid to compensate authorities for the difference between *(a)* the amount received from the non-domestic rates pool plus the amount that could be received by the authority from community charges if it charged the community charge for standard spending and *(b)* the standard spending assessment for the area as a whole.

PA Consulting

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will formally publish the report by PA Consulting group.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* No.

Sprinkler Systems

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures will be required to ensure that sprinkler systems will be effective during the lifetime of a building following the introduction of new building regulations on 10 December 1991.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

Section 15 of the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sport Act 1987 will be implemented to enable sprinklers to be cited on fire certificates as a means of fighting fire. I also plan to make regulations under section 12 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 to provide for the maintenance of such systems installed for the purpose of building regulations in non-certified premises. These measures will take effect from 1 June 1992.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Balance of Trade

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state for each year since 1962 *(a)* the visible trade balance and as a percentage of gross national product, and *(b)* the balance of payments and as a percentage of gross national product.

Mr. Mellor: Following is the information:

	Visible balance[1]		Current balance	
	£ billion	As percentage of GNP	£ billion	As percentage of GNP
1962	−0·1	−0·4	+0·1	+0·6
1963	−0·1	−0·4	+0·1	+0·4
1964	−0·5	−1·8	−0·4	−1·2
1965	−0·3	−0·8	−0·1	−0·2
1966	−0·1	−0·3	+0·1	+0·4
1967	−0·6	−1·7	−0·3	−0·8
1968	−0·7	−1·9	−0·3	−0·7
1969	−0·2	−0·5	+0·5	+1·2
1970	nil	nil	+0·8	+1·8
1971	+0·2	+0·4	+1·1	+2·2
1972	−0·7	−1·3	+0·2	+0·4
1973	−2·6	−3·8	−1·0	−1·5
1974	−5·2	−6·8	−3·2	−4·1
1975	−3·3	−3·4	−1·5	−1·6
1976	−4·0	−3·5	−0·8	−0·7
1977	−2·3	−1·8	+0·1	nil
1978	−1·6	−1·1	+1·1	+0·7
1979	−3·3	−1·9	−0·5	−0·3
1980	+1·4	+0·7	+2·8	+1·4
1981	+3·3	+1·5	+6·7	+3·1
1982	+1·9	+0·8	+4·6	+1·9
1983	−1·5	−0·6	+3·8	+1·4
1984	−5·3	−1·9	+1·8	+0·6
1985	−3·3	−1·1	+2·9	+0·9
1986	−9·6	−2·9	+0·2	+0·1
1987	−11·6	−3·2	−4·2	−1·1
1988	−21·6	−5·4	−15·5	−3·9
1989	−24·6	−5·6	−20·4	−4·6
1990	−18·7	−3·9	−15·2	−3·2
1991	−10·0	—	−5·8	—

[1] Balance of payments basis.

Departmental Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the source of the statistics published by his Department relating to company profitability, liquidity and investment.

Mr. Maples: Gross profitability is calculated using national accounts estimates, all the sources of which are

described in "National Accounts: Sources and Methods". The main sources are tax assessments and statistical inquiries.

More information on the calculation of the profitability of industrial and commercial companies, on the sources of data on liquidity and on the sources of data on gross trading profits are contained in Central Statistical Office bulletins 71/91, 89/91 and 86/91, respectively.

Copies of all the publications referred to are in the Library of the House.

Global Growth Strategy

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *12*, what response he gave to the United States Treasury Under-Secretary's request for co-operation in the development of a global growth strategy among G7 countries.

Mr. Maples: The Chancellor attended the meeting of G7 finance Ministers in New York on 25 January. The Ministers and governors had a full discussion of prospects for their economies, under the chairmanship of United States Treasury Secretary Brady. They agreed there was a need to intensify their co-operative efforts to improve the conditions for non-inflationary growth in their economies, thereby strengthening the world economy. A copy of the statement issued after the meeting is in the Library of the House.

Corporation Tax

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the figure of corporation tax paid in 1989-90 and 1990-91 for each of the three groups industrial and provident societies, building societies, and co-operative societies, which are aggregated on page 77 of the Inland Revenue Statistics 1991.

Mr. Maude: Building societies paid £614 million of mainstream corporation tax in 1989-90 and £556 million in 1990-91. Industrial and provident societies and co-operative societies paid £33 million in 1989-90 and £43 million in 1990-91. Further disaggregation of these figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Board of Inland Revenue

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his proposals relating to the review of management and grading and the review of the organisation and structure of the Board of Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: An announcement will be made as soon as decisions have been arrived at.

Bingham Inquiry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his evidence to the Lord Justice Bingham was oral or in written form; if he will publish his evidence; and whether the evidence was given at his own request.

Mr. Maples: Lord Justice Bingham is taking evidence in private, for reasons which are well understood. It would not therefore be appropriate for me to publish the evidence I have given to Lord Justice Bingham or to disclose any details about it. The Prime Minister assured the House on 22 July 1991, at column 759, that all Ministers and officials would co-operate fully with Lord Justice Bingham's inquiries, and we are doing so.

Inspectors of Taxes

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the rewards, financial or non-financial, for Her Majesty's inspectors of taxes arising as a result of interest, penalties and back duty investigations in which they were engaged; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Inspectors of taxes, like other civil servants, are eligible to be considered for performance pay based on an appraisal of their overall performance over a period. But they do not receive any financial or non-financial rewards based on the results of back duty investigations in which they have been engaged.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, limiting all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance and relief on contributions to personal pensions to the basic rate, with a 50 per cent. income tax band on taxable incomes of (1) £31,705 and above, (2) £33,705 and above, (3) £36,705 and above, (4) £38,705 and above, (5) £41,705 and above, (6) £43,705 and above, (7) £66,705 and above and (8) £76,705 and above, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected;

(2) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, and limiting all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, with relief on contributions limited to personal pensions to the basic rate, and relief on employees' contributions to occupational pension schemes limited to the basic rate, with a 50 per cent. income tax band on taxable incomes of (1) £31,705 and above, (2) £33,705 and above, (3) £36,705 and above, (4) £38,705 and above, (5) £41,705 and above, (6) £43,705 and above, (7) £66,705 and above and (8) £76,705 and above, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected;

(3) if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, and limiting relief on contributions to personal pensions and occupational pension schemes to the basic rate, and limiting of all personal tax allowances except the single person's allowance to the basic rate, and with a 50 per cent. income tax band on taxable incomes of (1) £31,705 and above, (2) £33,705 and above, (3) £36,705 and above, (4) £38,705 and above, (5) £41,705 and above, (6) £43,705 and above, (7) £66,705 and above and (8) £76,705 and above, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer on 21 January 1992]:* It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the introduction of the upper limits specified would yield the following.

Yield following restriction of specified allowances and relief on contributions to personal pensions to the basic rate (£ million)

50 per cent. taxable income threshold	*Upper Limit for total allowances and reliefs*		
	£10,000	*£15,000*	*£20,000*
£31,705	470	200	120
£33,705	470	200	120
£36,705	470	200	120
£38,705	470	200	120
£41,705	470	200	120
£43,705	470	200	120
£66,705	470	200	120
£76,705	460	200	120

Yield following restriction of specified allowances and relief on contributions to occupational pension schemes limited to the basic rate (£ million)

50 per cent. taxable income threshold	*Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs*		
	£10,000	*£15,000*	*£20,000*
£31,705	540	240	150
£33,705	540	240	150
£36,705	530	240	150
£38,705	530	240	150
£41,705	530	240	150
£43,705	530	240	150
£66,705	520	230	140
£76,705	520	230	140

Yield following restriction of specified allowances and relief on contributions to personal pensions and occupational pensions to the basic rate (£ million)

50 per cent. taxable income threshold	*Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs*		
	£10,000	*£15,000*	*£20,000*
£31,705	450	190	120
£33,705	450	190	120
£36,705	450	190	120
£38,705	450	190	120
£41,705	450	190	120
£43,705	450	190	110
£66,705	440	190	110
£76,705	440	180	110

The number of people with total allowances and reliefs in excess of £10,000 is about 635,000. The corresponding figures for £15,000 and £20,000 are about 75,000 and 35,000 respectively.

The estimates of revenue yield do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

It is not possible to provide corresponding detailed estimates for 1992-93.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in a full year in *(a)* 1991-92 and *(b)* 1992-93 of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of (i) £10,000, (ii) £15,000 and (iii) £20,000 a year, with a 50 per cent. income tax band on taxable incomes of (1) £31,705 and above, (2) £33,705 and above, (3) £36,705 and above, (4) £38,705 and above, (5) £41,705 and above, (6) £43,705 and above, (7) £66,705 and above and (8) £76,705 and above, giving the total revenue in each case and the numbers of people affected.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* After the introduction of a 50 per cent. tax band the estimated further yield from imposing the specified limits would be as follows:

Full year yield at 1991-92 income levels

Threshold for 50 per cent. tax	*Limit for total allowances and reliefs*		
	£10,000	*£15,000*	*£20,000*
£31,705	710	290	170
£33,705	700	290	170
£36,705	700	290	170
£38,705	700	290	170
£41,705	690	290	170
£43,705	690	290	170
£66,705	660	280	170
£76,705	650	280	170

The number of people with total allowances and reliefs in excess of £10,000 is about 635,000. The corresponding figures for £15,000 and £20,000 are about 75,000 and 35,000 respectively.

It is not possible to provide corresponding detailed estimates for 1992-93.

Tax and National Insurance

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the net average gain or loss of those on gross incomes of between £20,280 and £27,000, £27,000 and £33,000, £33,000 and £50,000 and over £50,000, of an increase in the national insurance contributions upper earnings limit to £33,000, a 42 per cent. tax band between £33,000 and £50,000 and a 50 per cent. tax band on incomes over £50,000; and how many taxpayers are in each of the four income groups.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* Information for 1992-93 is as follows for those with gross incomes in the ranges specified. The tax regime has been applied in terms of taxable income ranges—income after deduction of allowances and reliefs—with the thresholds specified.

Gross income	*Number of taxpayers* *Thousands*	*Average increase in tax and NIC*[1] *£ per year*
Less than £20,280	20,210	0
£20,280—£27,000	2,500	90
£27,000—£33,000	930	380
£33,000—£50,000	870	640
Over £50,000	490	3,840
Total	25,000	120

[1] Compared with statutory indexation.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the net revenue implications in a full year of *(a)* an increase in the national insurance contributions upper earnings limit to £33,000, *(b)* a tax band of 42 per cent. on gross income between £33,000 and £50,000 and *(c)* a tax band of 50 per cent. on gross income over £50,000.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* At 1992-93 levels of income an increase in the upper earnings

limit for employees to £33,000 would yield about £1·4 billion in a full year. The imposition of a 42 per cent. tax rate on taxable incomes between £33,000 and £50,000 and 50 per cent. on taxable incomes over £50,000 would yield an additional £1·7 billion in a full year compared with statutory indexation. Taxable income is after deduction of reliefs and allowances. It is not possible to provide a cost of applying these rates to ranges defined in terms of gross incomes, because tax liability depends on the allowances and reliefs available to those concerned.

Income Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the revenue which would be raised by a tax rate of 50 per cent. on taxable incomes of £70,000, and at decreasing £5,000 levels from this level.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 27 January 1991]:* The information is in the table.

Estimated yields in 1992-93 from a 50 per cent. tax rate

Threshold of taxable income at which 50 per cent. rate is charged (£)	*Yield at 1992-93 levels of income (£ million)*
25,000	3,360
30,000	2,700
35,000	2,250
40,000	1,920
45,000	1,670
50,000	1,470
55,000	1,320
60,000	1,190
65,000	1,090
70,000	1,000

These estimates do not allow for any behavioural effect that might result from such changes to the tax system and do not include capital gains tax.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

India

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his recent visit to India; and what response the Indian Government has made to Her Majesty's Government raising of alleged human rights abuses, particularly in the Punjab.

Mr. Hurd: I visited India on 15 to 18 January. I had useful meetings with the President, the Prime Minister, and the Ministers for External Affairs, Home Affairs, Finance, Defence and Commerce. Our relations with India have improved and are in an excellent state, which enables both sides to speak frankly as between friends even about sensitive matters.

I expresssed strong support for the Indian Government's decision to hold elections in Punjab, and my hope that a similar political process could start in Kashmir. At the same time I criticised interventions from outside which promote violence in both places. On human rights, I emphasised the importance of greater openness in dealing with allegations of abuses and urged that Amnesty International be allowed access to report on the situation. The Indian Government gave assurances that alleged abuses of human rights were all investigated, and noted my points about the need for more transparency.

Israel

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Israeli Government concerning the continued closure of Bir Zeit university.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 6 January our ambassador in Tel Aviv, together with his EC colleagues, made strong representations to the Israeli Foreign Minister about the decision to extend the closure order on Bir Zeit university. We shall continue to do all we can to persuade the Israelis to allow all academic institutions in the occupied territories to function freely.

Kuwait

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Kuwait Government concerning the abuse of human rights to non-Kuwaiti citizens.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Since the liberation of Kuwait we have made repeated representations to the Kuwaitis about the need to respect the human rights of non-Kuwaiti citizens. I am happy to say that there has been a considerable improvement in this regard.

Cambodia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain a copy of the report, "Land Mines in Cambodia: the Cowards' War", by Rae McGrath, for his departmental library.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The publication has been ordered.

Nicaragua

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people are employed in Her Majesty's embassy in Nicaragua; and whether he has any plans to increase the establishment.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: An ambassador supported by one other United Kingdom-based and six locally engaged staff. Levels of staffing are, however, kept under constant review.

Iraq

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made for the destruction and removal of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction as identified by the United Nations team.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The special commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency have already destroyed, removed or rendered harmless munitions, components, equipment and materials from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme. Details are outlined in UN Security Council documents S/23295, 17 December 1991, S/23165, 25 October 1991, and S/23268,

4 December 1991, copies of which are in the House of Commons Library. These reports also describe future destruction and removal plans currently in the planning phase, or under negotiation with contractors.

Gulf States

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has recently made to the Gulf states Governments concerning a democratisation of their political systems.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have explained to Governments of the Gulf countries our policy for promoting good government, democracy and human rights. Every state in the region needs to find its own way to provide for popular participation in government. We welcome the commitment of Kuwait to hold elections to the national assembly in October, as we welcome both the establishment of Oman's consultative council in December 1991, and plans to establish a similar council in Saudi Arabia.

Felesmina Dos Santos Consecao

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Indonesian Government over the case of Felesmina Dos Santos Consecao, jailed in connection with the Santa Cruz massacre.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are aware of the charges against Miss Dos Santos Consecao and as her case is presently sub-judice it would be wrong to make representations to the Indonesian Government.

Correspondence

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Worsley dated 30 November concerning Mr. Kadir, of 21 Standfield drive, Boothstown, Worsley.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The migration and visa correspondence unit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office replied in accordance with standard practice on 21 January.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Research Institutes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list by standard region *(a)* the research institutes operated for, or on behalf of, his Department and the total employment thereat, *(b)* the total number of such institutes and the total employment therein and *(c)* if he will express the regional totals as a percentage of the national totals.

Mr. Leigh: The Department has four research establishments as follows: the Laboratory of the Government Chemist—LGC—and the National Physical Laboratory—NPL—both based at Teddington; Warren Spring Laboratory—WSL—at Stevenage; and the National Engineering Laboratory—NEL—at East Kilbride. Each of the establishments has been established as an executive agency.

The details requested are as follows:

Establishment and Region	*Staff in post*	*Percentage in region*
LGC		
South East	337·5	79·1
NPL		
South East	833	
WSL		
South East	313·5	
NEL		
Scotland	391·5	20·9
TOTAL	1,875·5	100

Trade Fairs (Support)

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about the support available from his Department to assist United Kingdom companies participating in overseas trade fairs.

Mr. Sainsbury: The report of a Rayner efficiency scrutiny review of the status of the Department's fairs and promotions branch was presented to me in June 1991. A copy was placed in the Library of the House. I have accepted the key recommendations of the report, which are:

"the separation of the operations of Fairs and Promotions Branch into two units, one concerned with the administration of grant support and the other with the delivery of exhibition project management services. The services unit will operate on a full economic cost basis from 1 April 1992. The feasibility of its becoming a "Next Steps" agency will be reviewed in the Autumn of 1993;

greater freedom of choice for sponsoring organisations, such as trade associations and chambers of commerce, to negotiate directly with exhibition organisers and contractors for space and/or stand construction so as to obtain maximum benefits on behalf of their exhibitors;

simplification of the administration of the grant support scheme. This will involve the introduction of fixed grants towards the costs of space and stand construction to replace the present system of assistance of half the estimated direct costs of providing these facilities."

We will be introducing administration grants to offset the cost of sponsoring organisations of making their own arrangements for the provision of exhibition services and increasing the level of travel grants available to eligible exhibitors taking part in exhibitions outside western Europe.

Offers of support under these new terms, which are designed to maintain the level of subsidy to eligible exhibitors at broadly 50 per cent. of the costs of space and stand provision, will be introduced after 1 April 1992. There will be no cut in the budget available to the fairs and promotions branch. Rather, the introduction of a streamlined system of fixed grants will enable the branch's budget to support a greater number of British groups attending overseas trade fairs.

These new arrangements will achieve substantial savings in administrative costs, and better value for money for British exporters. They will lead to even more effective United Kingdom representation at overseas trade fairs.

Cotton

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the number of cotton mill closures which have occurred in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what estimate he has made of the cost to the United Kingdom economy in each of those years.

Mr. Leigh: This information is not available.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the value and volume of output of the United Kingdom cotton spinning industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what corresponding figures he has for the average of the rest of Europe in each of those years.

Mr. Leigh: The value of output of spinning and doubling on the cotton system—SIC activity 4321—is shown on pages 250-251 of "Business Monitor PA 1002", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Comparable information for Europe is not available, nor is information available on the volume of output.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has concerning the profitability of *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the European cotton spinning industries.

Mr. Leigh: This information is not available.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent action he has taken to prevent the dumping of spun cotton products by *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Brazil and *(c)* Egypt.

Mr. Sainsbury: The European Commission opened an anti-dumping investigation into imports of cotton yarn on 22 March 1990. Provisional anti-dumping duties were imposed by the Commission on 28 September 1991 on imports from Brazil, Egypt and Turkey. The provisional duties are due to expire on 28 March 1992 and we are awaiting the Commission's proposals for terminating the investigation definitively.

Arms Exports Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether temporary export licences are required by United Kingdom manufacturers for equipment that they intend to display at the Eurosatory arms export exhibition to be held in Paris from 22 to 27 June.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* Any item which falls under the control of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1991 requires an export licence before it can be exported, whatever the purpose of export. Whether that licence is for a temporary or permanent period of export depends upon the circumstances of each case.

Instruments of Torture

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on his policy on the export of strobe lights and white noise generators;

(2) what investigations he is undertaking into exports to the United Arab Emirates of equipment capable of use for the purposes of torture.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 23 January 1992, at columns *292-94*.

TRANSPORT

Bus Demonstration Projects

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which bus demonstration projects he will be supporting.

Mr. Freeman: Supplementary credit approvals totalling £3 million are to be allocated to local authorities in England outside London for capital expenditure on measures to promote bus use in 1992-93. Table 1 sets out the detailed allocations. The Department will be writing to each of the authorities notifying them of the purpose for which approvals have been given. Up to a further £1 million is being held for schemes in London. Consideration is being given to projects in London in the light of the red route proposals and a further announcement will be made as soon as possible.

These allocations are in addition to acceptance of the Chester park and ride scheme for transport supplementary grant at a total estimated cost of £1·245 million which was announced on 19 December as part of the main transport supplementary grant and credit approval settlement for 1992-93.

I am pleased that local authorities are giving serious consideration to the role of the bus in helping to alleviate the problems of our urban environment. The allocations we have made will enable authorities to introduce a number of measures to promote bus use, including a range of bus priority schemes. We shall be monitoring some of the projects for demonstration purposes. I would like this to be the start of an ongoing programme and more resources are planned for this purpose in 1993-94.

I am also keen to encourage the use of low floor buses and to evaluate the possible part that clean fuel vehicles might play in meeting our future transport needs. We shall be writing to local authorities inviting them to put forward proposals for projects of this nature for which further supplementary credit approvals could be allocated.

Table 1

Local authority supplementary credit approvals for bus priority measures 1992-93

	£,000
Counties	
East Sussex	225
Oxfordshire	200
Hampshire	20
Surrey	25
Avon	100
Norfolk	225
Leicestershire	70
Northamptonshire	100
Nottinghamshire	300
Lancashire	250
Cleveland	50
Metropolitan Districts	
Birmingham	165
Coventry	50
Dudley	100
Walsall	70
Manchester	150
Salford	150
Oldham	100
Leeds	200
Sheffield	350
Newcastle	100
Total	3,000

Privatisation

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give in respect of each privatisation since 1979 *(a)* the loss or profit of each company in the five years prior to privatisation and *(b)* any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. McLoughlin: The available information is as follows.

(a) Profit performance
(pre-tax profit (loss)—Historic cost convention)

£ million

Company (Year privatised)	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*
NFC (1982)	n/a	n/a	4·3	—	—	—	—	—	—
ABP (1983)	22·4	11·5	(10·3)	5·5	—	—	—	—	—
NBC[1]	—	—	5·0	19·0	27	25	18	—	—
British Airways (1987)	—	—	—	(108·0)	74	185	191	195	—
BAA[2] (1987)	—	—	—	—	30	48	72	84	90

[1]The National Bus Company was broken up and sold as 72 separate companies between 1986 and 1988. Figures are not available for each individual company. The figures given are the operating profit of the NBC group, before taxation and extraordinary items, and after receipt of operating subsidiaries.
[2]Last full year in public sector.

(b) Grants and loans
The figures given below are the industries' external financing outturns; these are net figures which include government approved borrowing and grants. The grant element is indicated where applicable.

£ million

	1977-78	*1978-79*	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
NFC EFL	37	29	28	10	7	—	—	—	—	—	—
[Grant	29	13	11	5	2]	—	—	—	—	—	—]
ABP EFL	—	−13	−7	1	13	−12	—	—	—	—	—
[Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—]	—	—	—	—	—]
NBC EFL	—	—	—	—	74	56	58	49	41	19	118
[Grant	—	—	—	—	64	69	66	64	66	—	—]
BA EFL	—	—	—	—	149	−35	−174	−335	−211	−113	—
[Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—]	—]
BAA EFL	—	—	—	—	2	2	18	10	−21	17	−9
[Grant	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—]

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *656-57*, on discussions with other Governments on research into accidents caused by motorists falling asleep, if he will give details of the most recent occasion on which his regular contacts included discussion of this aspect of road safety.

Mr. Chope: Driver fatigue was most recently discussed with officials of the United States National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at a meeting in Washington on 16 January.

London Travel Statistics

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he possesses concerning the passenger hours spent in movement in central London on a normal weekday by *(a)* foot, *(b)* bus, *(c)* underground railways, *(d)* black taxi cab and *(e)* private motor car.

Mr. McLoughlin: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what information he has concerning the passenger miles carried in central London during a usual week by *(a)* private motor cars, *(b)* black taxi cabs, *(c)* buses and *(d)* public or chartered coaches;

(2) what information he possesses concerning the approximate proportion or percentage of passenger miles travelled per day on roads in central London by *(a)* private motor cars, *(b)* black taxi cabs, *(c)* buses and *(d)* public and chartered coaches during (i) weekday peak hours, (ii) weekday non-peak hours, (iii) weekends and (iv) any other period.

Mr. McLoughlin: The available estimates are given in the table and relate to travel on trunk and principal roads in central London in 1990. These estimates have been derived from a number of sources and are very approximate.

	Million passenger kilometres travelled per:			*Percentage passenger kilometres by mode*		
	Week	*Weekday*	*Weekend Day*	*Week*	*Weekday*	*Weekend Day*
Cars	22·0	3·0	3·0	52	46	60
Taxis	2·5	0·5	0·5	6	8	10
London Buses	15·0	2·5	1·5	35	38	30
Other Buses	3·0	0·5	—	7	8	—

Note: Estimates of passenger kilometres are rounded to the nearest half million. The figures for weekdays and weekends are therefore not necessarily consistent with those for the weekly totals.

M3

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the portion of the new M3 south and east of Compton and Stanford village is to be completed and the present 50 mph speed limit discontinued.

Mr. Chope: The Compton-Bassett section of the M3 is expected to be open to traffic and the current speed limits lifted as soon as the signalling system has been completed.

A19

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for transport if he will list the road works which are to be carried out on that stretch of the A19 running through the Easington constituency in the financial year 1992-93, indicating the cost of such works.

Mr. Chope: The information requested has not yet been finalised but as soon as it is I shall write to the hon. Member.

Stranraer to Larne Ferries

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make public the report his Department has undertaken on hours worked by ratings on Sealink Stena Stranraer to Larne service ferries.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department is unable to make public its findings on the hours worked by ratings on Sealink Stena Stranraer to Larne service ferries because of undertakings given to respect the confidentiality of the seafarers concerned. However, I can confirm that an investigation has been undertaken and that steps have been put in hand by the company at the Department's request to ensure that working hours are properly recorded.

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* district councils and *(b)* metropolitan district councils have introduced a concessionary fares scheme for elderly or disabled people in their area under discretionary powers granted by the Transport Act 1985.

Mr. Rifkind: According to a survey by my Department in 1986, there were concessionary fare schemes for pensioners or disabled people in over 90 per cent. of districts in England and Wales, some operated by district councils and some by county councils. In metropolitan areas the passenger transport executives can provide these schemes, and I understand that they all do so. In London a scheme is funded by the boroughs.

Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is now in a position to announce his decision on the recommendation put to him by the board of the Tees and Hartlepool port authority concerning the sale of its undertaking.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. In my answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) on 18 December I said that I had written to the chairman of THPA to say that I was minded to give my formal consent to the sale of the authority's successor company —Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Ltd.—to Teesside Holdings Ltd. as soon as I was able to do so; and that this would be possible only after the scheme of transfer submitted by the authority under section 9(1) of the Ports Act 1991 and the order providing for a levy on disposals of land to be made under section 17 of the Act had come into effect. The former took effect on 30 December 1991 and the latter on 16 January.

Since I gave my answer to my hon. Friend's question on 18 December, a number of representations have been put to me concerning the sale, notably by Mr. John Hackney, the chief executive of THPA and chairman of the THPA Consortium plc, and by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), who have sought to persuade me that I should withhold my consent to the THPA board's recommendation concerning the sale of the port. I have considered the matters which have been put before me very carefully, including taking counsel's advice. I have concluded that there is nothing in them which would justify my taking a different decision from the one I was minded to take in December. I am satisfied that the THPA board conducted the sale of its undertaking properly, and fully in accordance with the procedure agreed with my Department. In so far as it has been represented to me that the advice of THPA's professional advisers was misleading to the THPA consortium, I am satisfied that it was proper advice and should not have given rise to any misapprehension on the part of the consortium. I am further satisfied that the board evaluated the final bids which it received in accordance with the objectives of sale agreed between THPA and myself and that it did not apply any additional or different objectives of sale. These objectives were:

"In assessing the merits of competing offers, the Board of the Authority will have particular regard to the desirability of encouraging the disposal to managers and staff of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital of its privatised undertaking. The Board will seek the best open market price for its undertaking having regard to its desire to ensure that after privatisation the undertaking should continue to operate in ways which are beneficial to the local economy. To that end the Board will look closely at the background and business plans of prospective purchasers to satisfy itself that they are directed to the maintenance of a viable, competitive port operation; to the maintenance of the port as a separate entity with day-to-day management and control located in Teesside; and to the need for proposals for the use of THPA's assets to be for the development of the port business or for the promotion of developments which are locally beneficial."

Among the matters drawn to my attention was the statement in the Teesside Holdings' bid that an existing member of the THPA board and a leading local solicitor, neither of whom was named, would be appointed to the Teesside Holdings' board. It was suggested that this created a potential conflict of interest on the THPA board in the consideration of the bids. Each of the non-executive members of the THPA board and their legal adviser have confirmed that they received no approach on this matter from 3i, whose nominees on the Teesside Holdings' board the directors would be; and Teesside Holdings has similarly confirmed that it made no such approach. I am satisfied that no conflict of interest arose in the THPA board's consideration of the bids.

I have also considered representations concerning Humberside Holdings and other companies associated with the Holloway family. Humberside Holdings, which is

itself owned in part by Powell Duffryn and in part by the Holloway family, holds an equal share with Powell Duffryn and 3i in the equity share capital of Teesside Holdings Ltd. Mr. John Holloway is the intended chief executive of Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Ltd. I have found nothing in the evidence put before me concerning either Mr. John Holloway or Humberside Holdings which would make it proper for me to withhold my consent to the proposed sale to Teesside Holdings Ltd.

I am now writing to the chairman of THPA giving my consent to the sale of the authority's undertaking to Teesside Holdings Ltd. I should like to place on record my appreciation of the patience which the chairman and members of the THPA Board have shown during the delay in my reaching a final decision caused by the need for me to consider these representations.

Leicester Eastern Bypass

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the consultation process will begin on the Leicester eastern bypass; and what are the expected start and completion dates.

Mr. Chope: In the event of a viable scheme being identified, it is likely that public consultation could take place in autumn 1993. Subject to the satisfactory completion of all the statutory procedures and the availability of funds, work could start around the end of the century with a construction period of about two years.

Tyre Treads

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence was used to justify the increase in tyre tread depth requirement from 1 mm to 1·6 mm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The increased tyre tread depth regulation was introduced in response to a mandatory requirement of EC directive 89/459. In its explanation of the expected impact on business costs and jobs, the EC Commission justified the measure on the basis that, among other things, it would result in an increase in road safety and a reduction in, and diminution in the costs of, accidents. The opinion of the Government was set out in explanatory memorandum 8714/87.

Dock Labour Scheme

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from third parties directly affected by the abolition of the national dock labour scheme.

Mr. McLoughlin: In early 1990, hon. Members wrote to me about three cases. One was on behalf of two constituents who worked in the office of a stevedoring company which went into liquidation when the dock labour scheme was abolished, and who complained that they received a lower scale of redundancy compensation than ex-registered dockworkers. The other two were on behalf of unsecured creditors of another firm, whose dividend from the liquidator was likely to be greatly diminished on account of this Department's claim for refund in respect of the employer's 50 per cent. contribution to compensation payments. I was unable to help in any of these cases.

A1 (Bypasses)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of the towns which have been bypassed along the route of the A1 since 1962.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 21 November 1991, at column *244*. The towns bypassed are as listed:

Aberford
Alnwick
Belford
Berwick upon Tweed
Biggleswade
Boroughbridge
Catterick
Doncaster
Eaton Socon/St. Neots
Felton
Gateshead
Grantham
Hatfield
Letchworth
Morpeth
Newark on Trent
Newcastle upon Tyne
Stamford
Stevenage
Welwyn Garden City
Wetherby

Bypassed by A1(M)
Birtley
Chester le Street
Darlington
Durham
Newton Aycliffe

Glasgow to London Rail Service

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's support for improved rail services from Glasgow to London.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail is continuing to develop plans for the west coast main line. An investment submission has not yet been put to the Department, but we will consider carefully any such submission.

Stockport Bypass

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on which date he expects the A6M Stockport bypass to be open to the public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* In 1995. There are a number of statutory procedures still to be completed. The scheme remains a high priority and these will be progressed as speedily as possible.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements he is making to receive financial advice on the channel tunnel rail link and to consult local authorities and other local interests about the project.

Mr. Rifkind: I am appointing Samuel Montagu and Company Ltd. to act as financial advisers on the rail link project.

Samuel Montagu will advise on private sector interests whilst the line is refined and on the best way in which to hand over the project to the private sector in due course.

It will also be the Department's point of contact for developers and other private sector concerns with a potential interest in funding and developing the rail link.

A new high-level forum, chaired by my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport, is also to be set up to allow discussions about the rail link project prior to the full public consultations which will be necessary as part of the environmental impact assessment. Local authorities directly affected by the project are being invited to be represented on the forum together with British Rail, my Department, Samuel Montagu, the Department of the Environment and Llewelyn-Davies Planning, the DOE's consultants for the east Thames corridor study. The London Planning Advisory Committee, SERPLAN and Eurotunnel are being invited to attend as observers. The forum is expected to meet for the first time on 17 February. The statutory environmental advisory bodies will also be involved in working-level discussions about the rail link.

PRIME MINISTER

Sellafield

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he is taking to ensure co-ordination of consideration by the Secretaries of State for Energy, for Environment and for Northern Ireland of the environmental impact of the Sellafield plant on Northern Ireland and the Irish sea.

The Prime Minister: I am satisfied that suitable mechanisms already exist to achieve the required co-ordination.

Bingham Inquiry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister on what date he gave his evidence to the Bingham inquiry; and if he will place a copy of his evidence in the Library.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing to add to the letter I sent the hon. Member on 22 January, a copy of which has been placed in the House Library.

Hong Kong

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the visits made to Hong Kong by Government Ministers since June 1987 giving the date and purpose of the visit in each case.

The Prime Minister: The following Government Ministers visited Hong Kong since June 1987 on Government business:

Ministerial Visits to Hong Kong

1987 (from June):

Lord Glenarthur, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in September.

1988:

Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in May; Lord Glenarthur, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in February and June; Mr. Chris Patten, Minister for Overseas Development, in September; Lord Young, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in June; Mr. Cecil Parkinson, Secretary of State for Energy, in June; Mr. George Younger, Secretary of State for Defence, in March; Mr. Archie Hamilton, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, in March; Mr. Ian Stewart, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, in January; Mr. Peter Morrison, Minister of State for Energy, in September; Mr. Wyn Roberts, Minister of State, Welsh Office, in September; Mr. John Macgregor, Minister for Agriculture, in September; Mr. Paul Channon, Secretary of State for Transport, in November; Mr. Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for the Environment, in December; Mr. Francis Maude, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in September.

1989:

Lord Mackay, Lord Chancellor, in December; Sir Geoffrey Howe, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in July; Lord Young, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in April; Lord Glenarthur, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in January; and his successor, Mr. Francis Maude, in September; Mr. Peter Viggers, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Industry, in November; and Mr. Richard Needham, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, in December.

1990:

Mr. Douglas Hurd, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in January; Mr. Michael Howard, Secretary of State for Employment, in September; Mr. Francis Maude, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in April and July; and his successor, Lord Caithness, in September; Mr. Tim Sainsbury, Minister for Trade and Mr. David Mellor, Minister for the Arts, in September; Mr. Peter Lloyd, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Home Office, in March and Mr. John Maples, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, in November.

1991:

I visited in September; Mr. Douglas Hurd, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in April and September; Mr. Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment, in September; Mr. Tom King, Secretary of State for Defence, in September; Mr. John Wakeham, Secretary of State for Energy, in November; Mr. John Gummer, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in October; and Lord Caithness, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, in January, July and December.

Departmental Information Systems

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the current state of implementation of FAMIS—financial and management information systems—or its equivalent in each of Her Majesty's Government's Departments; and what proposals he has to develop the system.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* Following the financial management initiative, most Departments have been developing financial and management information systems, although there is no single model. Executive agencies set up under the "next steps" initiative are now doing the same. Such systems require continuing development to clarify managerial responsibility, to give better information on how to improve value for money and quality of service from the resources consumed, and to meet changing business needs. The Government will continue to encourage the effort being devoted to developing such systems.

ENERGY

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will specify the marketing and public relations functions of Dewe Rogerson on electricity privatisation since the flotation of the generating companies in 1990-91.

Mr. Wakeham: Dewe Rogerson's functions in this period relate to the collection of the further instalments due on the shares in the privatised electricity companies.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) on what criteria Schroder Wagg was selected as underwriters on electricity privatisation in September 1990;

(2) on what criteria Schroder Wagg was selected to advise on a trade sale in the course of electricity privatisation from June to August 1990.

Mr. Wakeham: The firm was selected on the usual principal of their experience and expertise in the areas in question.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what advice he has received on electricity privatisation during 1991-92.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 23 January 1992, at columns *282-84*.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the fees to be paid in 1991-92 for advice on coal privatisation; and what estimate has been made for 1992-93.

Mr. Wakeham: The provision for preliminary expenses in 1991-92 in connection with the privatisation of British Coal is £5 million. Provision for 1992-93 is under consideration.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy further to his answer of 23 January, which of the advisers on electricity privatisation were appointed by competitive tender.

Mr. Wakeham: As a general rule the advisers listed in that answer were appointed through a process of competitive tendering. New tenders were not sought for certain of the reporting accountant and property valuer appointments where the firms were already retained by the electricity companies and were judged to have given satisfactory service. Competitions were not held for five contracts, either because they were very small, or on other specific grounds including that of limited alternative sources of expertise.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the total fees paid out to underwriters in the course of the privatisation of the regional electricity companies and the generating companies, respectively.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 25 June 1991, at column *437*.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any foreign individuals or organisations have been considered for appointment as consultants on mining safety and coal privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: No foreign individuals or organisations were considered for appointment as consultant on coal mining safety matters.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all those companies that acted as underwriters to the sale of the regional electricity companies, and of the generating companies, respectively, giving the date of their appointments in each case.

Mr. Wakeham: J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co. Limited was appointed in September 1990, as the Government's lead underwriters to the regional electricity companies sale, to assemble the underwriting group listed below as shown in the prospectus. The underwriting was secured by competitive tender, not by appointment.

Underwriters to the regional electricity companies sale

J. Henry Schroder Wagg and Co. Ltd.
Barclays de Zoete Wedd Ltd.
Baring Brothers and Co. Ltd.
The British Linen Bank Ltd.
Chartered WestLB Ltd.
Charterhouse Bank Ltd.
County NatWest Ltd.
Robert Fleming and Co. Ltd.
Guinness Mahon and Co. Ltd.
Hill Samuel Bank Ltd.
N. M. Rothschild and Sons Ltd.
Laing and Cruickshank
Lloyds Merchant Bank Ltd.
Samuel Montagu and Co. Ltd.
Morgan Grenfell and Co. Ltd.
Paribas Ltd.
Swiss Bank Corporation
UBS Phillips and Drew Securities Ltd.
S. G. Warburg and Co. Ltd.

There was no primary underwriting for the generating companies sale.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which of the organisations that have advised or are advising on electricity and coal privatisation respectively, have been criticised in public reports by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Wakeham: Of the advisers listed in my answers to the hon. Member on 23 January 1992, at columns *282-84*, such references have been made to the following firms engaged on electricity privatisation:

Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte; Ernst & Young; James Capel; Kleinwort Benson; Peat Marwick McLintock; Price Waterhouse; Smith New Court; and Spicer & Oppenheim.

The extent of criticism varies in scale, and reference should be made to the relevant reports.

No such references have been made to any of the advisers listed as engaged on coal privatisation.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are his current duties in relation to the co-ordination of Government publicity.

Mr. Wakeham: My responsibilities for co-ordinating the development of the presentation of Government policy are unchanged.

Coal Imports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's estimate of the likely total coal imports in the current financial year in both volume and value.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department does not make such estimates. Provisional figures suggest that the volume of coal imports in calendar year 1991 was 19·5 million tonnes and the value was £702 million.

British Coal (Chairman)

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has set objectives for the chairman of the British Coal Corporation.

Mr. Wakeham: I have agreed objectives with Neil Clarke, chairman of the British Coal Corporation, as follows:

1. The overall objective of the Corporation must be to develop a coal mining business that achieves sustainable profitability. British Coal must of course operate within the financial framework set by Government, and notably the Corporation's external financing limit and the required rate of return of at least 8 per cent. in real terms on the Corporation's investment programme. Specific objectives should be:
   (i) to achieve a profit (after interest and tax) on a group basis over the period 1991-92 to 1993-94;
   (ii) to achieve in the deep mine sector over that period an overall operating profit while at least breaking even on operational cash flow, including operational capital expenditure;
   (iii) to withdraw from all presently loss making business where practicable except in cases where there is the realistic prospect of achieving sustained profitability in the foreseeable future;
2. The Corporation should further review its policies on licensing both deep mines and opencast operations so as to enable the expansion of competitive private sector coal production.
3. The Corporation should continue to develop policies to mitigate adverse environmental effects arising from its activities.
4. The safety of all persons at British Coal workplaces must remain the Corporation's overriding concern. The safety objectives should be to aim for zero fatalities and progressively to reduce the reportable accident rate from that experienced in 1990-91.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Selection)

14. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the effects of the Greenwich judgment on the selection of schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Greenwich judgment widened the choice of school available to some parents by requiring applications from those living outside a local authority's area to be considered in the same way as those living within it. At our request, the London Boroughs Association and individual local authorities have submitted evidence about the effects of the Greenwich judgment on school admissions in 1991. I am considering the evidence and will give my conclusions soon.

Education Administration (Lancashire)

16. **Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the annual cost per pupil of administration on education of Lancashire county council in the latest year available.

Mr. Fallon: The information from Lancashire's section 42 budget statement for 1991-92 shows that the annual cost of administration per pupil is £60.

Teacher Supply

17. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his current assessment of teacher supply.

Mr. Fallon: Teacher supply has improved significantly —vacancies in 1991 fell by 20 per cent. and recruitment to teacher training rose by 21 per cent. These improvements are particularly marked in those subjects and locations to which it is traditionally difficult to recruit. Government efforts to make teaching more attractive are working and will be maintained to meet rising demand through the 1990s.

Grant-maintained Schools

18. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he can report on applications for, and agreement of, grant-maintained status.

Mr. Eggar: There are currently 168 schools approved for grant-maintained status, of which 143 are operating. Another 76 schools have published proposals, 43 schools are committed to publish proposals following a yes vote. A further 49 schools are committed to holding a ballot of parents on grant-maintained status.

22. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many school applications for grant-maintained status are now in the pipeline; how many other school reorganisation applications are currently before him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: A total of 168 schools are now in the process of applying for grant-maintained status, with published proposals, yes votes or ballots pending. There are currently some 118 proposals for school reorganisation under section 12 or 13 of the Education Act 1980 before the Secretary of State for decision. This figure excludes proposals which are expected to be determined by local education authorities. Where there are conflicting proposals, my right hon. and learned Friend is obliged to consider one set of proposals against the other and then decide on the grant-maintained proposals first, followed by the proposals from the local education authority and the governors of the voluntary-aided schools.

Primary Schools

20. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the implementation of the national curriculum in primary schools.

Mr. Eggar: The implementation of the national curriculum in primary schools is proceeding well, thanks in large part to the dedication and hard work of teachers, and is already achieving our objective of improving the quality of education offered to children.

Student Grants

21. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the efficacy of the distribution of mandatory student grants by local education authorities in the current academic year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Most local education authorities have managed to administer the record numbers of student awards this year on a satisfactory timescale. It is a matter for regret that a number of authorities, however, allowed significant backlogs to occur last autumn. My Department has investigated the complaints we have received, and has reminded the authorities in question of their obligations.

Grammar Schools

23. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards grammar schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government do not intend to impose any particular organisational pattern for schools. I believe in a diversity of provision of schools and I am ready to consider any application for change of character of school put forward by a local education authority for a maintained school or the governing body of a voluntary-aided or grant-maintained school. I will consider each application for a change of character from comprehensive to selective entry on its individual merits.

25. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many grammar schools have been closed since 1979.

Mr. Eggar: In January 1991 there were 106 fewer maintained grammar schools in England than there had been in January 1979. However it does not follow that this represents the number of actual closures in that period, since some of these may, for example, have merged with other schools, or transferred to the independent sector, or changed status within the maintained sector.

Teacher Training

24. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on his proposals for the reform of teacher training.

26. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the future of teacher training.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In my recent speech to the north of England education conference I announced that I would shortly be issuing a consultation document about my proposals for the reform of initial teacher training.

The consultation document has been issued today. It sets out proposed arrangements for partnerships between higher education institutions and schools, draft criteria for the approval of school-based secondary postgraduate courses and new procedures for the approval of courses. Copies have been placed in the Libraries.

Secondary schools, higher education institutions, teacher associations, teacher training organisations, Church bodies and others interested in teacher education are being invited to comment. The consultation period will last until the end of March.

School Repairs

27. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how far his recent announcement of capital allocation meets the backlog in repairs and maintenance of schools.

Mr. Fallon: Between 1986-87 and 1989-90, local education authorities spent over £2 billion on school buildings. We have provided a further £1·8 billion worth of annual capital guidelines and grant to local education authorities and governors of voluntary-aided schools since 1990-91. This will have done much to remedy the deficiencies noted in the 1986 survey of school buildings.

National Curriculum

28. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what expenditure was incurred by his Department in providing and issuing printed material including binders concerned with the national curriculum and the assessment of children in 1990 and 1991; and what is his estimate of the amount which this involved per teacher in the state school system.

Mr. Eggar: Expenditure by the Department on printed material concerned with the national curriculum and assessment amounted to some £2·5 million in the financial year 1990-91 and some £1·3 million in the period April to December 1991, total of £3·8 million.

There are about 400,000 teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools in England. The cost of these documents works out at roughly £9 per teacher on average.

138. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to ensure that local education authorities remain able to monitor the delivery of the national curriculum within the schools throughout their area.

Mr. Eggar: Under our proposals, local authorities will be sent full inspection reports every four years on every school they maintain. They will have annual information about assessment results across the national curriculum at four key ages. For the first time authorities will have reports and tables of information which apply national standards to their schools and show clearly what they are achieving.

School Building

29. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when they will be publishing their conclusions on the review of school building programmes.

Mr. Fallon: The results of the review of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981, which the Department is currently undertaking with the Welsh Office, are expected to be available towards the end of this year.

Northumberland Schools

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what visits he has made to schools in Northumberland.

Mr. Fallon: None.

Non-vocational Education

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to ensure that adult non-vocational education will continue at the present level in 1992-93.

Mr. Eggar: The level of provision for the further education of adults is a matter for individual local education authorities. The 1992-93 revenue support grant settlement allows for spending on education by local authorities to rise by 7 per cent.—substantially above inflation.

GCSE Passes

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the national average in schools for *(a)* the number of GCSE passes at A to C level for each child in the fifth form, *(b)* the percentage of children in the fifth form acquiring five or more GCSE passes at A to C level and *(c)* the percentage of grade A passes at A-level of the total subject entries.

Mr. Eggar: The average number of GCSE passes at grades A to C for 16-year-old pupils in schools in England in 1989-90 was 3·2. The proportion of 16-year-olds gaining five or more grades A to C at GCSE in the same year was 34·5 per cent. The proportion of attempts at A-level by school leavers in 1989-90, which resulted in grade A passes, was 14 per cent.

Further Education Funding Councils

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether, under the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*, the further education funding councils will be required to provide any educational provisions or facilities without charge to the student; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: There is no such requirement in the Further and Higher Education Bill but the Government have no intention of changing present practice whereby young people aged 16 to 18 attending full-time further education are not charged for the tuition they receive.

Adult Education (Liverpool)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what funding is available for adult education in Liverpool; how much is currently spent on adult education classes; how many courses and classes *(a)* are currently available and *(b)* were available in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1985, in Liverpool.

Mr. Eggar: In addition to grants for education support and training, spending on the further education of adults is covered by the education element of Liverpool's standard spending assessment, which is £202·941 million for the financial year 1991-92. It is not possible to identify within this figure a sum specifically for the education of adults.

In 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available, Liverpool LEA's net recurrent expenditure on the education of adults provided in separate adult institutions was £1·484 million. The cost of education for adults provided within further education colleges is not separately collected.

Information is not collected on numbers of courses and classes. The number of enrolments of those aged 19 and over in LEA maintained further education in Liverpool were (i) 23,700 in 1980-81—figures for 1979-80 are not available centrally—(ii) 29,900 in 1985-86 and (iii) 36,800 in 1990-91.

Sixth-Form Education

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of sixth form education is provided in single-sex schools.

Mr. Eggar: In January 1991, 15 per cent. of sixth form pupils in maintained schools in England were taught in single-sex schools.

Outside Toilets

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to update the 1977 survey conducted by his Department and the Welsh Office concerning information on the number of schools with outside toilets.

Mr. Fallon: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on 27 January 1992, at column *422*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Coopers and Lybrand

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the projects, the purposes, and the cost of his Department's use of the Coopers and Lybrand group since 1989.

Mr. Jack: The projects, and their purposes, which involved the use of Coopers and Lybrand—Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte since 1989-90 are as follows. We have not supplied information on the cost of this work as to do so could be a breach of commercial confidentiality.

Project title	*Purpose*
Agency Systems Planning—Various	Assistance given to the Department's Agency Systems Planning branch in connection with agency planning and implementation.
Agency Systems Planning, Training Seminars for Leaders	The provision of seminars on project management awareness for leaders of the DSS Agency Implementation Team.
Senior Management Structure—Organisational Analysis and Design	Provision of advice and the analysis of organisational issues pertinent to Social Security benefit delivery.
Procurement Management Information System (PROMIS Project)	To introduce a common purchasing system to cover all expenditure on goods and services.
Creation of the Purchasing and Supply Manual	The creation of a manual to act as a comprehensive guide to purchasing responsibilities and procedures.
Property Consultancy for Headquarters Relocation	Feasibility study into various aspects of staff accommodation costs during the period of relocation of DSS headquarters to Leeds.

Project title	Purpose
Development of Project Timetable, Critical Path and Monitoring for Benefit Agency Implementation Team	Identification of tasks needed to ensure the effective implementation of the Benefits Agency including their relationships, dependencies and timing.
Single Terminal Access Project (STAP) —Logo Design	To design a logo which may be affixed by the STAP suppliers to equipment prior to delivery.
Single Terminal Access (STAP) —Consortium Project	The provision of project management, financial and accounting and quality assurance advice as part of the Siemens Nixdorf consortium.
Customer Satisfaction Survey	To determine the level of customer satisfaction with ITSA and its products and services to enable ITSA to focus more sharply on customer needs.

Disability Working Allowance

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, when calculating housing benefit, it will be assumed that a claimant eligible for disability working allowance has claimed and is receiving it; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The determination of a claim for housing benefit is a matter for the local authority concerned. Regulations provide that in making that determination, a claimant shall be treated as possessing certain income which would become available if he applied for it. However, the qualifying conditions for disability working allowance are such that the local authority would not normally be able to anticipate the outcome of a claim for that benefit. We would not therefore expect disability working allowance to be taken into account as income until entitlement has been established and benefit awarded.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what alternatives he is considering to the disability working allowance scheme before it is introduced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: None.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what monitoring of the levels of employer provision for occupational pension funds takes place by Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement on the current trends in provision.

Miss Widdecombe: The monitoring of pension funds is a function of the Occupational Pensions Board—OPB—an independent statutory body, and the Inland Revenue. The OPB monitoring is focused on the ability of a fund which is used for contracting out of state earnings-related pensions to meet its liability for guaranteed minimum pensions, and not on the level of the employer's provision. The Inland Revenue monitors occupational pension funds which are tax approved and have 12 or more members by requiring an actuarial valuation every 3·5 years.

Earnings-related Supplement

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the estimated current cash value would be of the earnings-related supplement awarded to unemployed people at the time of its abolition in 1981, using the growth in earnings since 1981 as the uprating factor.

Mr. Jack: Using the latest average weekly rate of earnings-related supplement—November 1980—and uprating by the growth in earnings between April 1981 and April 1991, the value would be £9·80 a week.

Source:
The earnings index used is the New Series Index (Whole Economy) Seasonally Adjusted.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the numbers of disablement benefit claims for asbestos-related diseases referred to special medical boards, and the number in which the disease were diagnosed, for all available years commencing with 1988 in the same format as the tables given in reply to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) 30 June 1988, *Official Report*, columns *343-48*.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the tables.

Asbestos related diseases

Medical Boarding Centre	References Prescribed disease D1	D3	D8	D9	Total	Positive diagnosis Prescribed disease D1	D3	D8	D9	Total
1988										
Cardiff	65	35	32	42	174	22	32	7	17	78
Glasgow	154	77	26	13	270	42	73	11	5	131
London	118	178	41	63	400	46	162	10	20	238
Manchester	131	71	32	27	261	30	61	9	10	110
Newcastle	121	77	49	31	278	17	74	13	22	126
Sheffield	62	51	15	41	169	25	49	4	32	110
Stoke	29	19	12	9	69	17	19	4	4	44
Swansea	8	10	7	8	33	3	9	1	4	17
ALL CENTRES	688	518	214	234	1,654	202	479	59	114	854
1989										
Cardiff	67	55	24	39	185	36	51	8	20	115
Glasgow	167	57	26	30	280	75	55	11	21	162
London	114	148	34	43	339	48	134	7	17	206

Medical Boarding Centre	References Prescribed disease D1	D3	D8	D9	Total	Positive diagnosis Prescribed disease D1	D3	D8	D9	Total
Manchester	132	53	37	33	255	35	46	13	6	100
Newcastle	131	52	16	44	243	25	47	6	28	106
Sheffield	98	80	22	55	255	35	76	5	27	143
Stoke	25	29	9	11	74	11	26	4	1	42
Swansea	7	6	3	6	22	3	6	—	5	14
ALL CENTRES	741	480	171	261	1,653	268	441	54	125	888
1990										
Cardiff	62	57	32	50	201	27	53	11	14	105
Glasgow	216	54	33	39	342	90	53	9	21	173
London	113	171	51	60	395	59	160	7	20	246
Manchester	161	64	63	48	336	59	48	13	14	134
Newcastle	250	62	55	81	448	18	57	5	40	120
Sheffield	103	79	30	61	273	36	69	4	26	135
Stoke	26	24	17	14	81	11	19	4	9	43
Swansea	12	5	12	7	36	6	3	5	2	16
ALL CENTRES	943	516	293	360	2,112	306	462	58	146	972

MINIS

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what developments have taken place in his Department's use of the management information system for Ministers during his tenure as Secretary of State; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: MINIS is not a part of the Department's planning system.

Pensioners' Incomes

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners are in the top half of income distribution; and what was the comparable figure for 1979.

Miss Widdecombe: In 1987, 28 per cent. of pensioners were in the top half of the total income distribution, compared with only 24 per cent. in 1979.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements are currently undertaken by his Department to monitor the time taken to reply to a Member's letter passed on by his Department for attention of the Benefits Agency.

Miss Widdecombe: A computer record is maintained of all such letters, and any overdue replies pursued. Ministers receive a copy of all replies. It is the agency's aim to reply to all letters as quickly as possible once the facts of the case have been established. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind perhaps he would write to me.

Special Medical Boards

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the names of all the medical practitioners appointed to serve on special medical boards at each medical boarding centre, respiratory diseases; and whether they are full time or part time.

Mr. Scott: The doctors appointed to serve on special medical boards at medical boarding centres (respiratory diseases), are either full-time employees of the Benefits Agency, or work for the agency on a part-time sessional basis. Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Financial Management Initiative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what use he makes of the Department's financial management initiative programme.

Miss Widdecombe: The main objectives of the financial management initiative—FMI—which was launched in May 1982, were to promote organisations and systems which enabled managers at all levels to have a clear view of their objectives, measure performance in relation to those objectives and make best use of resources including securing value for money. The FMI has since largely become an all-embracing term for improvement in management in the civil service. The "next steps" initiative has been a logical development of the FMI.

The organisation and management systems which now exist and continue to be developed enable Ministers to give clear strategic direction, firmly related to government policy objectives, which informs the setting of planning objectives; determine the financial resources to be made available; select suitably robust and meaningful targets covering quality of service, financial performance and efficiency; and call chief executives to account.

Expenditure Statistics

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was spending on *(a)* the disabled and *(b)* the retired in real terms in (i) 1979, (ii) 1983, (iii) 1987 and (iv) 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Social Security spending on long-term sick and disabled people and elderly people is given in the table. All figures are at 1990-91 prices.

	Disabled people £ million	Elderly people £ million
1978-79	4,469	22,097
1982-83	5,468	25,123
1986-87	8,014	28,454
1990-91	10,118	28,590

Note:
1990-91 figures are estimated outturn.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits are available to sufferers from arachnoiditis; and whether such sufferers can claim mobility allowance.

Mr. Scott: A wide range of benefits, including mobility allowance, is available to sufferers of arachnoiditis, provided they meet the conditions of entitlement.

Invalidity Benefit

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether an employment training participant who was previously receiving invalidity benefit continues to be eligible for the therapeutic allowance of £39 per week; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Anyone receiving invalidity benefit who is also doing therapeutic work may continue with this work after transferring to employment training, provided that he fulfills the conditions of his employment training plan.

Earnings Disregard

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether an employment training participant who was previously receiving the income support disability premium continues to be eligible for the earnings disregard of £15 a week; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: Eligibility to the £15 a week earnings disregard will continue as long as the disability premium remains in payment. People who have been receiving the disability premium will normally retain entitlement to it while undertaking employment training. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind, perhaps she would like to write to me.

Disability Living Allowance Forms

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make available a stock of disability living allowance forms to recognised advice agencies such as welfare rights units and citizens advice bureaux.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 13 January, at column *516*.

Housing Benefits

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide for each district and islands council in Scotland for each available year starting from 1985-86 *(a)* a breakdown of the numbers of housing benefit claimants split into rent rebate and rent allowance categories and the total amounts paid under each heading, *(b)* the numbers and amounts of housing benefit backdated payments—regulation 72(15)—and the amount paid as a percentage of each local authority's housing benefit expenditure, *(c)* the numbers, amounts and percentage of amount in relation to total housing benefit expenditure in relation to discretionary payments—regulations 69(8)—and *(d)* a breakdown of the categories of housing benefit over-payments and details of the numbers in each category, giving the amounts in each category and the amount as a percentage of housing benefit expenditure.

Miss Widdecombe: Such information as is available has been placed in the Library.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the performance of local authorities in relation to the incentive areas in housing benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The incentive arrangements are designed to encourage prudent behaviour by local authorities in the administration of housing benefit and community charge benefit. A lower subsidy is paid to local authorities if they incur benefit expenditure in circumstances in which they have most scope to control costs.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the rule under which housing benefit to single people is reduced because of the housing benefit downrating rule after they have been in hospital for six weeks.

Miss Widdecombe: The majority of people are discharged from hospital within six weeks, and consequently housing benefit is not affected. For single people remaining in hospital beyond six weeks, housing benefit is calculated on the basis of a lower personal allowance. However, where someone continues to receive income support their housing benefit entitlement is unchanged and, overall, the system helps to ensure that claimants have sufficient income over and above the amount of their personal allowance to meet their eligible rent. These rules recognise the principle that the national health service provides free maintenance as well as free treatment for hospital in-patients, and that public funds should not make double provision for the same needs.

Family Credit

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families employed in farming were receiving family credit on 30 April 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Information is not available in precisely the form requested. The number of families receiving family credit on 30 April 1991 in farming, fishing, and related occupations was 9,000.
Source: 5 per cent. sample of the Family Credit caseload.

Social Fund

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of state for Social Security (1) how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 30 November;

(2) how many social fund inspectors were employed on 30 November.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the Social Fund Commissioner that on 30 November 1991, there were 66 social fund inspectors employed, and 3,167 review applications were outstanding for more than one month.

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the projected amount to be transferred in April 1993 in the care element of the social security budget for residential and nursing home care; and at what stage the balance between the housing and care elements will be determined.

Miss Widdecombe: The amount of the transfer has yet to be determined. We expect to be able to make an announcement shortly about the housing element for people entering residential care and nursing homes from April 1993.

Benefit Deductions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the cost to public funds of employing staff in 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively, in the posts allocated to making poll tax deductions from benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: The resourcing of Benefits Agency offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income-related Benefits

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will itemise the elements used to calculate the entitlements for income-related benefits such as income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Miss Widdecombe: The applicable amounts used to calculate income-related benefits are intended to cover all normal day-to-day living expenses and do not include separate amounts for specific items.

Attendance Allowance

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to distribute claim forms for attendance allowance for terminally ill people (DS 1500) to social workers employed by local authorities.

Mr. Scott: Claim forms for attendance allowance are available to social workers. The DS1500 is not a claim form; it is a medical report form.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence he has on the efficiency of general practitioners in administering the DS 1500 claim form for attendance allowance for terminally ill people.

Mr. Scott: The DS1500 is not a claim form; it is a medical report which supports an attendance allowance claim made on the grounds of terminal illness. There is no evidence to suggest that general practitioners are failing to provide these reports.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Industrial Development

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit has to implement the Government's new economic strategy of growing competitive industries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Industrial Development Board's plans are set out in its forward strategy published in December 1990 and in the document "Competitiveness and Growth" published in June 1991. The Local Enterprise Development Unit's plans are detailed in "Forward Thinking" published in May 1991. Copies of these documents are available in the Library.

Tobacco Industry

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of people employed in the tobacco industry in Northern Ireland *(a)* at the last date and *(b)* five years ago.

Mr. Needham: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible.

Exports

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of exports from Northern Ireland in 1991.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available. Figures for the export of goods from the United Kingdom are available only by point of exit, not by point of origin.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when Mr. Eddie Friel ceased to be chief executive of the Northern Ireland tourist board; what financial provision has been made him arising from this cessation of his employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I understand from the chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board that Mr. E. J. Friel resigned as chief executive on 11 December 1991 and that, following his resignation, financial provision was made in accordance with the terms of Mr. Friel's appointment to the staff of the board.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the basis of payment to the chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board; how many hours per week he works for the board; if he is involved in its day-to-day management; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Payment to the chairman of the board is on the basis that he devotes 2·5 days per week to its business. The board is responsible for the discharge of its statutory functions and it is for the board to decide what authority to delegate to its employees and how this is to be discharged.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the hon. Hugh O'Neill was appointed as chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board; how many persons have served as chief executive since that date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Mr. O'Neill was first appointed chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board on 1 July

1988 for a term of three years and reappointed on 1 July 1991 for a further three-year term. Following the Government's review of tourism in 1989, the then chief executive decided to take early retirement and was, at the invitation of the board succeeded by a Northern Ireland civil servant seconded to the board as executive director to help implement the new tourism strategy. Early last year, the civil servant indicated that, on completing 40 years' service in the Northern Ireland civil service, he would wish to retire in the late summer. The board decided therefore to recruit a chief executive and Mr. E. J. Friel was appointed with effect from 1 September 1991. Mr. Friel resigned, for personal and family reasons, on 11 December 1991 and the board appointed the deputy chief executive to temporarily act as the chief executive.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Northern Ireland tourist board will advertise the position of chief executive; if there will be any change in the terms of reference for this post from those previously applicable and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: I understand from the chairman of the Northern Ireland tourist board that the chief executive post will be advertised very shortly and that there will be no significant change in the chief executive's responsibilities from those previously advertised.

Belfast International Airport

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern ireland what facilities at Belfast international airport are made available for party political meetings; whether these facilities have been made available for members of the Conservative party; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Belfast international airport is a commercial enterprise which includes, in its facilities, a business centre available for private hire at the discretion of the airport company.

Rathlin Island (Electricity)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when mains electricity will be available on Rathlin Island; what number and proportion of householders will be connected; and how and where the electricity will be generated.

Mr. Needham: Mains electricity is expected to be available in September 1992. Forty-one householders—79 per cent.—have applied to be connected. Electricity will be generated on the island by wind turbines backed up by diesel generators.

House Building

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new houses have been built by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in each of the last five years; and what are the projected new start figures for the next three years.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose chief executive has advised me that it has started the following numbers of new dwellings in the last five years.

Year	*Number*
1986-87	1,675
1987-88	1,632
1988-89	1,554
1989-90	1,404
1990-91	1,007

The executive expects to start building 800 new dwellings in the current year but it has not yet proposed how its resources should be allocated for the next three years. Consequently, it is not possible to provide projected figures.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many new starts have been made by housing associations in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years; and what are the projected figures for each of the next three years.

Mr. Needham: The position for registered housing associations is as follows:

New Starts Year	*Dwellings (Self-contained)*	*Hostel Bedspaces (Shared)*
1987-88	692	285
1988-89	378	236
1989-90	623	41
1990-91	733	259
[1]1991-92	610	290
1992-93	600	250
1993-94	660	280
1994-95	720	300

[1]Figures for 1991-92 are estimated.

Social Security Allowances

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people in Northern Ireland have been in receipt of mobility allowance; and what has been the cost of this provision in each of the last five years;

(2) how many people in Northern Ireland have been in receipt of attendance allowance; and what has been the cost of the provision in each of the last five years;

(3) how many applications for mobility allowance in Northern Ireland have been *(a)* turned down and *(b)* granted upon appeal after initially being refused, in each of the last five years.

Mr. Hanley: Social Security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Repair and Improvement Grants

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* repair grants and *(b)* improvement grants have been made available by the Housing Executive in the last five years; and what has been the cost of the provision of these grants.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose chief executive has advised me that the information is as follows:

Year	Improvement Grants Number	Cost £ million	Repair Grants Number	Cost £ million
1990-91	2,699	21·3	3,894	9·4
1989-90	2,906	22·6	4,439	10·7
1988-89	3,539	23·6	6,267	12·2
1987-88	3,973	29·4	5,001	15·3
1986-87	4,868	34·8	10,622	21·1

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Housing Executive dwellings have been improved in each of the last five years; and what are the projected figures for the next three years.

Mr. Needham: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive whose chief executive has advised me that the number of its dwellings improved in each of the last five years was as follows:

	Number
1986-87	19,560
1987-88	37,036
1988-89	29,545
1989-90	13,095
1990-91	10,895

The executive expects to improve 9,450 dwellings in the current year but it has not yet proposed how its resources should be allocated for the next three years.

The high figures for 1987-88 and 1988-89 were due to the combined effect of a major insulation programme and the installation of new heating systems as a result of gas supplies being withdrawn.

House Improvements

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many houses in Northern Ireland have been improved by housing associations in each of the last five years; and how many are projected to be started in each of the next three years.

Mr. Needham: The position for registered housing associations is as follows:

Rehabilitation Starts	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92[1]	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95
Dwellings (Self-Contained)	75	118	279	101	130	100	110	120
Hostel Bedspaces (Shared)	106	272	103	83	70	50	50	60

[1] Figures for 1991-92 are estimated.

Bus Exhaust Emissions

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland further to his answer to the hon. Member for Antrim, South on 13 January, *Official Report*, column *482*, if he will list the specific measures being taken by Ulsterbus and Citybus to reduce exhaust emissions during their maintenance of buses.

Mr. Needham: I am advised by the managing director of Ulsterbus and Citybus Ltd. that as a routine part of the vehicle maintenance programme oil samples are taken from engines and subjected to spectographic analysis. This identifies at an early stage engines not functioning properly and enables remedial action to be taken.

DEFENCE

Military Training

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now cease the practice of offering military training by United Kingdom service men, or individuals privately contracted within his Department, to security personnel from *(a)* China, *(b)* indonesia, *(c)* Iraq and *(d)* Sri Lanka.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No military training is currently provided for China or Iraq. Personnel from Indonesia and Sri Lanka receive some military training in the United Kingdom. There are no plans to cease this practice.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the extent, content and scope of human rights instruction offered as part of military training of nationals other than United Kingdom nationals, by United Kingdom service men or individuals privately contracted within his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West, (Mr. Flynn) on 21 January 1992, *Official Report*, at column *188*.

Privatisations

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give in respect of each privatisation since 1979 *(a)* the loss or profit for the five years prior to privatisation and *(b)* any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The only privatisation that my Department has undertaken since 1979 was the sale of Royal Ordnance plc, following an open competition, to British Acrospace plc in April 1987. The trading results of the ROF's trading fund, which operated from 1 July 1974 to 1 January 1985, and of the successor company, after 2 January 1985, are given in the relevant published accounts. These were summarised in figure 1 of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, "Ministry of Defence: Sale of Royal Ordnance plc", HC 162.

Detailed records of my Department's financial transactions with the ROFs are no longer readily available. Precise information concerning any grants or loans in the period in question could therefore be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

REME Building, Woolwich Common

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about possible soil contamination at the REME building at Woolwich Common; and if he will publish the results of his Department's inquiries on the matter.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Representations have been received from a local resident; the health, environment and public protection committee of the London borough of Greenwich; the Ministry of Defence's Council of Civil Service Unions; and from some members of the garrison work force. The small amount of contamination poses no danger to members of the public and we are formulating plans for its removal. Results of the Department's monitoring survey have been made available to the local authority and to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution.

Byelaws (Breaches)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who gave instructions to Ministry of Defence police to arrest for breaches of the Forest Moor and Menwith Hill byelaws on 31 July 1991; and what is the current procedure for dealing with people who breach the byelaws.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave the hon. Member on 23 January at columns *338-39*.

Diversification

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to assist diversification by companies in the light of changing requirements.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leith (Mr. Brown) on 17 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *147*.

Mr. Bill Weir

Mr. Flynn: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the grades and duties of the posts held in his Department by Mr. Bill Weir since 1989.

Mr. Alan Clark: Mr. Weir is a grade 7 scientist who, during the period in question, has served as a metallurgist on the central staff of the Ministry of Defence.

Submarine Berthing Tugs

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for placing an order for submarine berthing tugs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I am pleased to announce that an order has been placed with Richard Dunston (Hessle) Ltd. of north Humberside to build two new submarine berthing tugs. The tugs will operate at the Clyde submarine base. The approximate value of the order is £10 million and delivery of the tugs is planned for spring 1993.

The tugs will be a valuable addition to the fleet of Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service support craft that carry out a range of tasks and which, while largely unsung, make a significant contribution to the efficient and effective operation of the Royal Navy.

International Arms Sales Register

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements are in hand for British participation in the register of international arms sales, effected on 1 January.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I have been asked to reply.

Information on 1992 weapons deliveries for the purposes of the register will be required by the UN by 30 April 1993. The disclosure by Britain of such information will require additional powers. The Government intend to bring the necessary legislation before the House early in the next Parliament. In the meantime, the Department of Trade and Industry has written to exporters of equipment in the register's categories to advise them of the need to provide information early next year.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Imported Meat Products

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that imported meat products from eastern Europe *(a)* do not undermine domestic producers and *(b)* are not imported into the EC without satisfactory health checks and proof of origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Community beef and pigmeat markets are protected by a system of minimum import prices and import levies. Some imports are permitted at reductions in the levy under concessionary schemes reflecting obligations entered into by the Euroepan Community and its trading partners in the context of multilateral trade negotiations. The concessions are limited to quantities which represent around 5 per cent. of total Community production of beef are less than 1 per cent. for pigmeat. They are broadly based on existing trade patterns and are therefore unlikely to cause disruption to domestic markets. In the case of sheepmeat, imports are governed by voluntary restraint agreements which in 1991, limited the quantity imported from eastern Europe to 26,000 tonnes. This represents less than 2·5 per cent of Community production.

Imports of meat and meat products into the Community from third countries, including eastern European countries, are required, under the terms of Community directives, to have been produced to public health standards at least as stringent as those governing intra-Community trade. As a guarantee that these standards have been met, consignments must be health marked with an approved form of label or stamp identifying the establishment of origin and accompanied by certificates issued by an official veterinarian of the exporting country. In Great Britain checks on consignments and their documentation are undertaken by port health authorities. As yet, Community law on these matters is not fully harmonized. However, as part of the single market arrangements, all imports of animal products from outside the Community will be subject to a specified regime of checks on imports of meat and meat products from outside the Community. Entry will be restricted to specific frontier posts having adequate staff and facilities to carry out the checks. Commission inspection teams will be responsible for ensuring that these rules are implemented fully by all member states.

I believe that these arrangements, essential to the single market, will be sufficient to ensure that imports do not present a health risk to consumers in the Community.

Sugar Beet

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total acreage permitted for the growing of sugar beet in north Yorkshire; and what variations have occurred in the last three years.

Mr. Curry: The areas of sugar beet grown under quota in the county of north Yorkshire for 1989 and 1990 were as follows:

	1989	*1990*
Hectares	12,794	12,469
Acres (approx.)	31,600	30,800

Source: June Census.

Reorganisation of British Sugar plc's processing arrangements will have resulted in an increase in acreage for 1991, but county figures are not yet available.

British Sugar plc is responsible for contracting with growers with a view to fulfilment of the United Kingdom white sugar quota. This is done in terms of tonnage of beet delivered to processing factories and not of area cultivated.

Canada Geese

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has undertaken regarding the humane control of Canada geese; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Research into Canada geese undertaken at the Ministry's central science laboratory is concentrated on techniques for control during the close season, when licences are required for the killing or taking of the geese and their eggs. Recent research, now almost completed, has focused on a simple method of making Canada goose eggs unviable without causing undue suffering to the adult birds. Research is also being undertaken on the population dynamics and movements of Canada geese to provide background for future studies on the effects that various control methods have on population size and movement.

Irradiation

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that any irradiated ingredients of compound ingredients in foodstuffs should be listed as irradiated ingredients.

Mr. Maclean: Rules for the labelling of all foods and listed food ingredients which have been irradiated have already been agreed by the EC and implemented by the Government. Further proposals on food irradiation currently before the Council of Ministers include more detailed rules on the labelling of irradiated ingredients. I am seeking to ensure that the further requirements on ingredient declarations are as comprehensive as practicable.

Ghana

Mr. Alton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what regulations United Kingdom food exporters specialising in the export of meat have to observe when exporting to Ghana; and what procedures enable intervention beef to be exported to Ghana by British export companies.

Mr. Maclean: There are no specific regulations governing the export of meat from the United Kingdom to Ghana. Exporters must comply with the relevant Ghanaian import requirements. To enable British exporters to satify these requirements the Agriculture Departments can provide veterinary certificates confirming the health status of the meat, based on our current understanding of the Ghanaian import conditions.

EC export refunds are available for open market and intervention beef sent to Ghana, subject to compliance with normal Community rules.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the refrigerated lorries used to store BSE carcases while awaiting incineration are dedicated completely to this purpose alone; what regulations cover the storage of BSE carcases in refrigerated lorries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The refrigerated containers used for BSE carcases are dedicated to this purpose. Their use is controlled and monitored by the State Veterinary Service.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to his answer of 23 January, how many cows with bovine spongiform encephalopathy have been identified *(a)* on the farm, *(b)* at the livestock market, *(c)* at the slaughterhouse and *(d)* at other locations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The information for Great Britain requested by year is as follows:

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*[1]1991*
Number of BSE cases confirmed:				
(a) on farm	2,142	7,008	13,936	21,404
(b) at markets	16	55	106	140
(c) at abattoirs	27	73	137	111

[1]Provisional.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many carcasses of cattle with bovine spongiform encephalopathy were *(a)* buried or *(b)* incinerated in the United Kingdom during 1991.

Mr. Gummer: Between 1 January 1991 and 31 October 1991 a total of 353 carcasses were buried and 23,968 were incinerated.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to his answer of 23 January, if he will list the location of storage centres where bovine spongiform encephalopathy carcasses can be stored which are not dedicated for this purpose; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: There are none.

Animal Welfare

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration has been given to the animal welfare implications of EC directive 91/497 in respect of the additional distances animals may have to travel before slaughter.

Mr. Maclean: Animals can be transported satisfactorily with proper safeguards. The Transit of Animals (Road and Rail) Order 1975 requires food and water to be offered at intervals not exceeding 12 hours. There will continue to be opportunities for all sizes of business under the single market rules.

Agricultural Land (Planning Applications)

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effect of the planning policy guidance note on the countryside and rural economy on his Department's policy on planning applications affecting the development of agricultural land.

Mr. Gummer: Planning policy guidance note 7 reaffirms my Department's policy of protecting the best and most versatile agricultural land.

Sheep Dip Products

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the review of sheep dip products has been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The independent Veterinary Products Committee—VPC—has completed the initial phase of its review. It has concluded that at present there is no clear evidence that sheep dips cause an unacceptable level of health risk to humans when used in accordance with the label instructions. Nevertheless the VPC has noted that certain aspects of the products and conditions of use need further evaluation, in particular; the level of purity of the active ingredient; the toxicity of other ingredients and solvents in the product formulations; studies of farm operators, including blood tests and details of protective clothing worn; studies to show which areas of the bodies of operators are most exposed; the persistence of residues in the fleece.

The companies concerned are being asked to provide additional data by the end of 1992. These, together with any further reports of suspected adverse reactions, will then be considered by the VPC. On the basis of its advice, decisions will then be taken by the licensing authority on the future authorisation of sheep dip products.

Meanwhile, it is essential that all those who use sheep dips should read the product labels and follow the manufacturers' instructions for preparing the dip solution and carrying out the dipping. All operators must ensure that they wear the necessary protective clothing when preparing the dip, dipping and handling freshly dipped sheep. The use of sheep dips is subject to the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations. Health and Safety Executive leaflet AS 29 "Sheep Dipping—Protect your Health" sets out the minimum items of personal protective equipment normally identified on the product label and that need to be worn when sheep dipping.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bolivia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the World bank's forestry and environmental guidelines have been fully applied to the World bank lowlands programme in Bolivia.

Mrs. Chalker: It conforms to the guidelines in force at the time of project approval in 1990.

Mixed Credits

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which projects funded under the aid-trade provision—ATP—in 1991 would be ineligible for aid funding under the recent OECD agreement on the use of aid in mixed credits; and what is the value of aid and trade provision funds involved;

(2) what effect the recent OECD agreement on the use of aid in mixed credits will have on the British aid programme and the size of the aid trade provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The detailed implementation of this agreement on export and tied aid credits is still under discussion among OECD donors. Its effect on all such donors, including the United Kingdom, will be to reduce aid and trade distortions, and to focus international aid support in areas that need it most. The ATP is presently the subject of a review which will take account of this agreement. Decisions on the future level of the ATP budget will be taken in the light of the review and in the context of the annual planning and budgeting exercise for the aid programme as a whole.

WALES

Waiting Lists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many patients had been waiting for more than *(a)* four months and *(b)* one year on a consultant's in-patient waiting list for major joint replacement surgery, as at 1 January in each district health authority in Wales;

(2) how many patients had been waiting for more than *(a)* four months and *(b)* one year on a consultant's in-patient waiting list for cataract surgery, on 1 January in each district health authority in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information is collected centrally on a speciality basis but not for specific operations.

A48

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received regarding his proposals to introduce a crawler lane for the A48 at Hardwick Hill, Chepstow; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A climbing lane—crawler lane—formed part of both the red and blue routes included in the public consultation exercise held in the summer of 1988 for the Hardwick hill improvement.

I announced on 9 July 1991 that following a careful assessment of all the options and representations, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposed an improvement along the line of the existing A48 as his preferred option.

A summary of all representations made at that time are included in the statement "Results of Public Consultation". Many additional representations have been received since then. These restate the same views by the same interests. Gwent county council as agent is currently preparing possible options for the improvement of Hardwick hill. A climbing lane forms part of one of these options, but it is too early to say whether such a solution would be adopted.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidelines are currently produced by his Department to local authorities concerning the use of co-disposal, incineration or chemical treatment to deal with waste products.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The following guidelines have been produced:

(a) Co-disposal—Waste Management Paper No. 26 on Landfilling Wastes.

(b) Incineration—Process guidance notes on the incineration of clinical waste, animal carcasses, general waste and sewage sludge.

(c) Chemical treatment—Processes are to be controlled by HMIP, not local authorities. Guidance notes are in the course of preparation.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many grant applications have been made by each local authority in Wales for the assessment of disused waste disposal sites for potential landfill gas generation and leachate problems.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: None. No grant is available specifically for the purposes indicated.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to introduce guidelines to local authorities concerning the reduction of waste at source and the removal of recyclable material from the waste stream.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Guidance to local authorities on devising and implementing recycling strategies and on the preparation of waste disposal plans was issued in the form of waste management paper No. 28 in July 1991. A draft Welsh Office circular on the recycling credit provisions of section 52 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 together with appropriate draft regulations was sent to local authorities on 21 January in advance of the regulations coming into force on 1 April.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are currently undertaken by his Department to ensure that all waste disposal sites in Wales are properly restored.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for local planning authorities to impose restoration conditions on planning permissions for waste disposal sites. Waste management paper No. 26 advised on the assessment, design, preparation, operation and restoration of such sites.

A465

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he can now give a firm date for construction work to begin on the A465 missing link.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales explained in his letter of 17 December, the scheme is to start in 1992-93. The precise date is contingent on the management of the trunk road programme as a whole.

Mine Workings (Ferruginous Discharges)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sites in each local authority area in Wales are currently affected by ferruginous discharges from long-abandoned mine workings.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Affected sites	*Total sites*
Clwyd		5
Delyn	1	
Glyndwr	1	
Wrexham Maelor	3	

	Affected sites	Total sites
Gwynedd		3
Aberconwy	1	
Meirionnydd	1	
Ynys Mon	1	
Dyfed		3
Ceredigion	2	
Llanelli	1	
West Glamorgan		9
Afan	3	
Lliw Valley	2	
Neath	3	
Swansea	1	
Mid Glamorgan		7
Ogwr	6	
Rhymney Valley	1	
Gwent		2
Islwyn	2	

Source: National Rivers Authority, Welsh Region.

Tertiary Colleges

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to encourage and promote the development of tertiary colleges.

Sir Wyn Roberts: It is for local education authorities to determine the pattern of educational provision for those aged 16 to 19 in their area.

Company Directors (Disqualification)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy on granting financial or other assistance to companies whose directors have been disqualified under section 216 of the Insolvency Act 1986.

Mr. David Hunt: Applications for assistance from such companies would be accepted for appraisal in the normal manner, with particular care being paid to the quality of management and the future viability of the company concerned.

Redundancies, Bangor

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what analysis he has made of the impact of recent redundancies in Bangor on *(a)* the local economy, *(b)* local families and communities and *(c)* the individuals directly affected;

(2) what steps he has taken to provide training, job opportunities and other help to those recently made redundant in the Bangor area and others who are already unemployed in the area;

(3) what analysis he made of the job opportunities available to the people recently made redundant in the Bangor area.

Mr. David Hunt: The Employment Service and the local training and enterprise council—Targed—will continue to offer advice to employees faced with redundancy on the range of support services available including retraining, job search and short courses to help those affected reassess their careers. The first tranche of redundant workers from Ferranti have all received counselling interviews and the results are being analysed by Targed. A comprehensive range of services to help longer-term unemployed back to work is also in place and Targed is targeting the employment training and enterprise action programmes on areas of high unemployment including the Bangor area.

In addition my Department, the Welsh Development Agency and other Government agencies operate a wide range of other measures aimed at combating unemployment. The Welsh Office and all the other bodies will continue to look for, and respond swiftly to, development opportunities that arise which have the potential to reduce unemployment.

Denis Ferranti Meters

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps have been taken by his Department to help Denis Ferranti Meters to diversify its activities in the light of the direct effects of market changes;

(2) what steps he has taken to assist Denis Ferranti Meters.

Mr. David Hunt: My officials have had many meetings with the company to discuss possible assistance to enable it to diversify; these discussions continue. The Welsh Development Agency also remains in close contact and continues to provide advice on a range of matters, including potential business partners.

Land Drainage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, columns 77-79, on what basis of previous experience of providing supplementary land drainage in built-up residential areas he has approved the remedial drainage measures envisaged by the development corporation.

Mr. David Hunt: My acceptance in principle of the concept of remedial drainage measures was based on the professional advice of Mr. Roy Stoner, director of the Institute of Irrigation Studies at Southampton university, Hydrotechnica Ltd. and Cardiff Bay development corporation.

Takeovers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 3, on inward investment, whether the project and job figures include *(a)* the sale of British Airways aero-engine maintenance base to General Electric, *(b)* the sale of the Amerlite Division of Amersham International to Kodak and *(c)* the sale of the Camford engineering subsidiary of Markheath plc to Hoesch.

Mr. David Hunt: The Amersham and Camford Engineering cases were included in the 1991 statistics. The acquisition of British Airways aero-engine plant at Nantgarw will be included in this year's figures.

Inward Investment

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 3, on inward investment, what share each county, or other convenient sub-division, received of the projects and promised jobs.

Mr. David Hunt: The projects recorded for each county are as follows:

County	*Projects*	*Total jobs*
Clwyd	48	3,052
Dyfed	8	1,290
Gwent	45	3,948
Gwynedd	15	1,579
Powys	3	120
Mid Glamorgan	31	4,705
South Glamorgan	21	1,310
West Glamorgan	12	1,056
TOTAL	183	17,060

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 3, on inward investment, whether the figures for projects and jobs arising from inward investment in 1991 includes any netting off of the effects of disinvestments or closures by previous flows of inward investment.

Mr. David Hunt: No.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 3, on inward investment, what proportion of the projects and jobs promised is related to *(a)* acquisition of businesses or business premises already in existence in Wales and *(b)* construction and development of new business premises.

Mr. David Hunt: The 1991 figures include 12 acquisitions—6·5 per cent.—involving 3,839 jobs—22·5 per cent. Records are not kept of the proportion of projects that involve new building.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 3, on inward investment, which of the projects recorded were from *(a)* firms from overseas new to Wales, *(b)* firms from overseas already established in Wales, *(c)* from the rest of the United Kingdom new to Wales and *(d)* firms from the rest of the United Kingdom already established in Wales; and how many jobs are promised in each case, distinguishing between those to be (i) created and (ii) safeguarded.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is as follows:

	Projects	*New Jobs*	*Safeguarded Jobs*
(a)	36	2,659	26
(b)	40	3,708	2,385
(c)	55	1,456	12
(d)	33	1,996	352

The remainder of the 183 projects recorded during 1991 were acquisitions—12 projects, 64 new jobs, 3,775 safeguarded jobs—and joint ventures—seven projects, 255 new jobs, 372 safeguarded jobs.

Electronics

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what new contracts and business opportunities in *(a)* the electronics sector, and *(b)* other sectors have arisen to date from the Minister of State's visit to the middle east in 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the supplementary answer given by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) on 20 January 1992, at column 5. Direct commercial contacts were the responsibility of the companies which took part in the trade mission, or exhibited at the trade fair. None of the 12 companies taking part in the mission was from the electronics sector; although two of the Welsh companies represented at the Rebuild Kuwait trade fair were. Welsh Office stand at that fair made more than 230 contacts for the 26 companies which it represented; of those, 14 contacts were for companies in electronics sector. Details of these contacts have since been passed to the companies concerned.

Middle East (Visit)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the north Wales companies that were involved in the Minister of State's visit to the middle east last year.

Mr. David Hunt: My right hon. Friend led 12 companies on a trade mission to Kuwait, none were from north Wales. A further 10 Welsh companies exhibited at the Rebuild Kuwait 1991 trade fair, two of whom were from north Wales. The Welsh Office itself took a stand at the fair in order to represent Welsh companies who were unable to attend themselves. Three of the 26 companies so represented were from north Wales.

Training Resources

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about resources for training in Wales in 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: I am pleased to announce today the resources which will accompany the transfer of responsibility for training to my department in April. I have maintained the overall level of expenditure on training at around this year's level. Subject to parliamentary approval, more than £156 million will be available for training in Wales in 1992-93.

This expenditure will support a range of measures to raise the skill level of people in Wales, and to help those who are unemployed back to work. Most of this will be spent on programmes delivered through training and enterprise councils. Further details will be laid before Parliament in the 1992-93 supply estimate in due course.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will publish a table showing the latest available results from the employment training leavers' survey for each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise company area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of ET leavers who had *(a)* been entered for a vocational qualification, *(b)* obtained a vocational qualification, *(c)* had failed to obtain a vocational qualification and *(d)* were awaiting their results; and how many of the ET leavers in the relevant period had completed the training agreed in their initial action plan;

(2) if he will publish a table showing the latest available results from the employment training leavers' survey for

each training and enterprise council area in England and Wales and each local enterprise company area in Scotland broken down to show the number and proportion of ET leavers who were *(a)* in a full-time job with their work experience employer, *(b)* in a full-time job with another employer, *(c)* employed in their own business, *(d)* in a part-time job, *(e)* in voluntary work, *(f)* on another Government training programme, *(g)* on a full-time education or training course, *(h)* unemployed and claiming benefit, *(i)* unemployed and not claiming benefit, *(j)* in a job club and *(k)* doing something else.

Mr. Jackson: As the information requested is contained in a number of separate tables, I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women living in the Greater London area who are at present taking employment training scheme courses.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the form requested. Training and enterprise councils are required to ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity between all individuals in access to, treatment on, and outcome from the training and enterprise programme covered by the agreement between the Secretary of State and the TECs.

Cotton Spinning

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of employees (whole time equivalent) in *(a)* the United Kingdom cotton spinning industry and *(b)* the European cotton spinning industry in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson: Estimates of the number of full and part-time employees in employment are available for the United Kingdom from the periodic censuses of employment and are given in the table. The information collected in the census is not sufficiently detailed to support the accurate calculation of full-time equivalents. Comparable estimates for the European cotton spinning industry are not readily available.

Employees in employment in the United Kingdom cotton spinning industry[1]

Thousands

September	*Full-time*	*Part-time*[2]	*All*
1981	22·8	2·6	25·4
1984	15·5	1·7	17·1
1987	18·9	1·5	20·4
1989[3]	14·7	1·1	15·9

[1] Activity heading 4321 of the Standard Industrial Classification 1980.
[2] Part-timers are defined as those working not more than 30 hours per week.
[3] Latest currently available.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the number of successful prosecutions of employers who have refused to comply with the quota conditions of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944 since 1961.

Mr. Jackson: Five employers have been prosecuted and found guilty of offences under provisions of the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, since 1961. One case was in 1964. The employer was convicted of terminating the employment of a registered disabled person without reasonable cause, whilst not employing the 3 per cent. quota of registered disabled people. There was a similar conviction in 1973. In 1975, three employers were convicted, each on two counts, of engaging people who were not registered as disabled, without a permit, while below quota. In all five cases, the employers were fined.

Apex Trust Leicester

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will provide additional resources for Apex Trust Leicester Ltd.

Mr. Jackson: I am not aware of any involvement between the Department and Apex Trust Leicester Ltd. However the Employment Service has a contract with Apex Leicester Project Ltd. for provision of a job club in Leicester. There are no plans to change that contract.

HEALTH

Expenditure, North West Thames Region

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for the North West Thames region and for each of its districts, for each year from 1978-79 onwards, current expenditure on the hospital and community health services *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* adjusted using the appropriate national health service pay and prices index.

Mr. Dorrell: Tables I and II show the information requested for, respectively, North West Thames region and its individual districts for each year since 1982-83. Information on a comparable basis is not available for earlier years because:

(i) North West Thames covered a wider area before 1 April 1982.
(ii) District health authorities did not exist before 1 April 1982.

Table III, however, shows figures for spending in the years 1978-79 to 1981-82 by the North West Thames region as it was then constituted.

All tables show expenditure in cash and in input volume terms. Changes in input volumes are however an inadequate guide to the level of service the National Health Service can be expected to achieve, since they do not reflect the continuing success of the National Health Service in increasing the efficiency with which it uses resources. The third column of each table therefore shows the relevant expenditure figures in real terms, ie adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator.

Table I
North West Thames region revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services

	Cash	*Input volume terms*	*Real terms*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*
1982-83	620	1,070	969
1983-84	652	1,070	974
1984-85	687	1,066	978
1985-86	718	1,058	968
1986-87	766	1,056	999
1987-88	833	1,059	1,031
1988-89	946	1,088	1,092
1989-90	1,025	1,101	1,112
1990-91	1,103	1,103	1,103

Table II

North West Thames Region—revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	1982-83			1983-84			1984-85		
	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
North West Thames RHA	20,336	35,080	31,940	21,103	34,630	31,528	22,546	34,969	32,079
North Bedfordshire DHA	29,879	51,541	46,928	31,517	51,719	47,087	33,484	51,934	47,642
South Bedfordshire DHA	30,796	53,123	48,368	34,518	56,644	51,570	36,550	56,689	52,004
North Hertfordshire DHA	19,771	34,105	31,052	21,064	34,566	31,470	22,339	34,648	31,784
East Hertfordshire DHA	24,926	42,997	39,149	25,633	42,064	38,296	27,480	42,621	39,099
North West Hertfordshire DHA	42,484	73,285	66,725	45,181	74,142	67,501	48,310	74,929	68,736
South West Hertfordshire DHA	32,795	56,571	51,508	34,736	57,002	51,896	36,733	56,973	52,264
Barnet DHA	59,777	103,115	93,886	61,836	101,473	92,384	64,054	99,348	91,137
Harrow DHA	34,701	59,859	54,501	35,961	59,012	53,726	36,643	56,833	52,136
Hillingdon DHA	46,374	79,995	72,835	48,423	79,462	72,344	52,147	80,880	74,196
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA	45,497	78,482	71,458	47,580	78,079	71,085	50,207	77,871	71,435
Ealing DHA	34,522	59,550	54,220	36,235	59,462	54,135	39,602	61,423	56,346
Riverside DHA[1]	112,258	193,645	176,312	117,019	192,028	174,827	122,419	189,872	174,180
Parkside DHA[2]	99,099	170,946	155,645	104,629	171,696	156,317	108,656	168,525	154,598
Total	633,215	1,092,296	994,526	665,435	1,091,979	994,166	701,170	1,087,515	997,638

[1] Hammersmith and Fulham DHA and Victoria DHA in 1984-85 and prior years.
[2] Brent DHA and Paddington DHA in 1987-88 and prior years.

Table II

North West Thames Region—revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	1985-86			1986-87			1987-88		
	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
North West Thames RHA	23,531	34,685	31,730	21,720	29,952	28,355	8,671	11,021	10,736
North Bedfordshire DHA	33,936	50,022	45,760	37,037	51,074	48,351	39,791	50,574	49,268
South Bedfordshire DHA	39,211	57,797	52,873	42,174	58,158	55,057	47,225	60,023	58,472
North Hertfordshire DHA	23,349	34,416	31,484	25,352	34,960	33,097	27,633	35,122	34,214
East Hertfordshire DHA	28,513	42,028	38,447	30,732	42,379	40,120	34,799	44,230	43,087
North West Hertfordshire DHA	50,752	74,808	68,435	66,945	92,317	87,396	73,990	94,041	91,611
South West Hertfordshire DHA	38,540	56,808	51,968	28,206	38,896	36,822	30,924	39,304	38,289
Barnet DHA	65,574	96,656	88,421	74,283	102,436	96,975	80,456	102,260	99,617
Harrow DHA	36,573	53,909	49,316	39,549	54,538	51,631	43,600	55,416	53,984
Hillingdon DHA	54,951	80,998	74,097	59,962	82,688	78,279	65,194	82,862	80,721
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA	51,572	76,017	69,541	54,667	75,386	71,367	59,419	75,522	73,570
Ealing DHA	40,265	59,351	54,294	44,131	60,857	57,612	46,772	59,447	57,911
Riverside DHA[1]	128,455	189,343	173,211	133,418	183,983	174,175	145,660	185,134	180,350
Parkside DHA[2]	113,626	167,485	153,215	119,605	164,935	156,142	128,641	163,503	159,278
Total	728,848	1,074,322	982,791	777,781	1,072,560	1,015,380	832,775	1,058,457	1,031,109

[1] Hammersmith and Fulham DHA and Victoria DHA in 1984-85 and prior years.
[2] Brent DHA and Paddington DHA in 1987-88 and prior years.

Table II cont.

	1988-89			1988-90			1990-91		
	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
North West Thames RHA	12,454	14,322	14,387	14,529	15,604	15,762	18,672	18,672	18,672
North Bedfordshire DHA	43,537	50,068	50,294	47,611	51,134	51,651	50,807	50,807	50,807
South Bedfordshire DHA	51,974	59,770	60,040	57,034	61,255	61,873	62,079	62,079	62,079
North Hertfordshire DHA	32,224	37,058	37,225	35,899	38,556	38,945	40,445	40,445	40,445
East Hertfordshire DHA	39,833	45,808	46,015	44,191	47,461	47,940	47,733	47,733	47,733
North West Hertfordshire DHA	83,519	96,047	96,481	89,881	96,532	97,507	95,516	95,516	95,516
South West Hertfordshire DHA	35,612	40,954	41,139	39,198	42,099	42,524	42,610	42,610	42,610
Barnet DHA	90,204	103,735	104,204	100,785	108,243	109,336	110,319	110,319	110,319
Harrow DHA	48,407	55,668	55,920	52,870	56,782	57,356	56,497	56,497	56,497
Hillingdon DHA	74,483	85,655	86,043	81,347	87,367	88,249	90,636	90,636	90,636
Hounslow and Spelthorne DHA	67,316	77,413	77,764	73,744	79,201	80,001	77,550	77,550	77,550

	1988-89			1988-90			1990-91		
	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Ealing DHA	53,102	61,067	61,343	58,157	62,461	63,091	62,729	62,729	62,729
Riverside DHA	165,903	190,788	191,651	171,387	184,070	185,928	176,262	176,262	176,262
Parkside DHA	147,144	169,216	169,981	158,079	169,777	171,491	170,883	170,883	170,883
Total	945,712	1,087,569	1,092,488	1,024,712	1,100,541	1,111,654	1,102,738	1,102,738	1,102,738

Table III
North West Thames region revenue expenditure on Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS)

	Cash	Input volume terms	Real terms
	£ million	£ million	£ million
1978-79	380	1,165	963
1979-80	451	1,146	979
1980-81	580	1,153	1,065
1981-82	650	1,194	1,088

Notes to the tables:

1. Expenditure on the HCHS covers services directly managed and/or accounted for by the health authorities (at the relevant time) including hospital, community health, patient transport (i.e. ambulance), blood transfusions and other services.

2. The figures are derived from the annual accounts of the health authorities in the region. 1990-91 figures are subject to audit.

3. The figures for the period 1982-83 to 1986-87 shown in Table I have been adjusted, by excluding as far as practicable revenue expenditure relevant to services for which the health authorities ceased to hold management and/or accounting responsibility, in order to make them comparable with figures for more recent years. (The exclusions consist primarily of a proportion of the total costs of the London Ambulance Service which since 1987-88 have been wholly accounted for by the South West Thames Regional Health Authority).

4. DHA figures are derived directly from the annual accounts. They have not been adjusted to exclude the effect of changes in the pattern of service management and accounting arrangements at both regional and district levels during the period (for example, the transfer of management responsibility for Leavesden Hospital from South West Hertfordshire to North West Hertfordshire in 1987-88).

5. The volume input terms column of each table shows the cash figure for the relevant year expressed at 1990-91 prices after adjustment by the HCHS pay and prices index.

6. The real terms column of each table shows the cash figures for the relevant year expressed in 1990-91 prices after adjustment by the GDP deflator.

Winter Death Rates

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish winter death rates for each EC country for which statistics are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

Winter death rates[1] for the last 10 years for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and the last 5 years for the EC countries for which figures are available

Country	1989-90	1988-89	1987-88	1986-87	1985-86	1984-85	1983-84	1982-83	1981-82	1980-81	1979-80	1978-79	1977-78	1976-77
England and Wales	12·7	11·7	12·2	11·7	12·9	12·7	10·7	11·2	11·3	11·0	—	—	—	—
Scotland	[2]12·7	[2]12·7	[2]12·8	[2]12·5	[2]13·7	[2]12·9	[2]12·8	[2]13·4	[2]14·1	[2]12·9	[2]13·1	—	—	—
Northern Ireland	[2]9·9	[2]9·9	[2]10·8	[2]10·1	[2]11·2	[2]10·7	[2]10·7	[2]10·8	[2]11·1	[2]11·2	[2]11·4	[2]11·3	—	—
Belgium	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11·6	11·9	11·7	12·1	11·9	—	—	—
Denmark	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11·5	11·4	11·1	11·6	11·1	—	—	—
France	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10·4	11·0	n/a	n/a	n/a	10·4
Germany, F. R.	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11·8	12·1	12·1	12·0	11·9	—	—	—
Greece	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9·9	9·2	9·6	10·1	9·1	—	—
Irish Republic	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10·1	10·6	10·5	10·4	10·8	—	—
Italy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10·5	10·1	10·3	10·6
Luxembourg	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11·7	11·5	11·6	12·3	11·3	—	—	—
Netherlands	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8·5	8·4	8·5	8·3	8·3	—	—	—
Portugal	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	10·9	9·8	10·9	10·3	10·2	—	—
Spain	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8·4	8·6	8·6

[1] Calculated from deaths, October to March. (Rates expressed per 1,000 population).
[2] Data tabulated by date of registration rather than occurrence.

Source: United Nations Demographic Yearbook.

Computers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the capital expenditure and *(b)* revenue expenditure incurred on computer hardware and software by each individual health authority in England and Wales in 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A table showing the information requested and derived from the annual accounts of health authorities in England has been placed in the Library.

The table covers all relevant expenditure incurred by the health authorities in their management and direct provision of all hospital and community health services.

Information relating to Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the incidence of morbidity in children resulting from the ingestion of cryptosporidium oocysts.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally. A study carried out by the Public Health Laboratory Service in 1985-87 covering over 60,000 patients, identified cryptosporidium infection in 2 per cent. of cases. Cryptosporidium infection was found in 4·9 per cent. of one to four-year-olds.

Bathing Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he gives to bathers about swimming in heavily polluted waters.

Mr. Dorrell: Certain bathing beaches identified as posing a risk by the EC directive, are regularly tested and the results of sampling publicly posted. In addition, the local environmental health officer may post warning notices where abnormal results are detected.

Ambulance Service

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has of the population to which, because of relative remoteness from ambulance stations, the time standard for an ambulance to arrive after call out, set out in the patients charter, cannot at present apply; whether he has any proposals to provide funds or a requirement for ambulance services in such areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The location of ambulance stations is not necessarily a critical factor in meeting time standards in rural areas as vehicles may respond from predetermined critical location points.

Decisions on resources for the ambulance service and the standards required are made by the health authority or NHS trust purchasing the service, against the background of the national charter standard.

Children (Dental Care)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to abolish the capitation payments to general dental practitioners in relation to the provision of dental care for children.

Mr. Dorrell: We have no such plans. The capitation arrangements for the dental care of children are an important part of the preventive approach.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is now able to announce future plans for the relocation of the national development team for mentally handicapped people; and if he will make a statement on its role.

Mr. Dorrell: Plans for the future location of the national development team are under discussion with its director. We expect to make an announcement soon.

Appointments

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is empowered to make appointments to senior posts with district health authorities; and what conditions are placed on the appointment procedure, in particular the extent of advertising such posts inside and outside the NHS and the drawing up of a sufficient shortlist of appropriately qualified candidates.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The relevant employing authority is the body empowered to make appointments to senior posts with district health authorities. Guidelines have been issued by the Department to the chairmen of the health authorities advising on advertising, short-listing, interviewing, final selection, and appointment procedures.

Unless there were exceptional circumstances, we would expect all NHS posts, including those at senior management level, to be advertised both inside and outside the NHS, and to be openly competitive.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people were prescribed neuroleptic drugs in each year since 1986; how many of these were people suffering from a mental handicap; and how many of these were people under the age of 16 years;

(2) how many people were diagnosed as suffering from tardive dyskenesia in each year since 1986; how many of these were people suffering from a mental handicap; and how many of these were people under the age of 16 years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Dental Contracts

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek to base the new dental contract on the principle of capitation for children.

Mr. Dorrell: The new dental contract already reflects the capitation principle. Dentists receive a monthly capitation fee for each child registered with them. Monthly continuing care payments are made for each adult registered.

NHS Regulations

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make the National Health Service (General Medical Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We anticipate making both the General Medical Services and General Pharmaceutical Services Regulations 1992 in March 1992.

Rugby NHS Trust

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are now being seen each quarter by the Rugby NHS trust; and what were the comparable figures in a similar period in 1990.

Mr. Dorrell: Quarterly data about the number of patients seen by the Rugby NHS trust are available for the 1991-92 year, but are not available on this basis for the previous year. Six-monthly statistics are available and indicate that in the first six months of the current year —April to September 1991—the Rugby NHS trust treated 4,879 ordinary in-patient admissions and 954 day cases. This compares to figures of 4,767 ordinary in-patient admissions and 359 day cases for the previous year. This represents an increase of 13·8 per cent. in the number of in-patients—ordinary admissions plus day cases—treated in the first six months of operation as an NHS trust.

A total of 24,184 out-patients were seen by the trust in the period April to September 1991, this compares with a total of 25,373 seen in the corresponding period in the previous year.

Employment Provisions

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether basic employment provisions, such as sick pay and employer-supported pension schemes, are required for nursing and administration staff by his Department of general practices contracted in to the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: General practitioners are independent contractors who normally employ their own practice staff. They are subject to the same statutory requirements regarding sick pay, maternity pay and state retirement pension as are other employers.

Pain Management

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance has been offered to health authorities on the holding of pain clinics and the provision of pain management programmes.

Mr. Dorrell: The provision of services for diagnosis and relief of pain is a matter for individual health authorities to determine, taking account of local needs, priorities and resources and the views of the medical profession locally.

Prescriptions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend the present rules to equalise the ages at which men and women may receive free prescriptions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Exemption from prescription charges on grounds of age is currently linked to the state retirement pension age—65 for men and 60 for women. Whilst we have no plans to change this arrangement, the Government will examine closely the outcome of the forthcoming deliberations on EC directive 79/7.

Current arrangements for exemption on grounds of health or status, underpinned by the separate scheme for remission on grounds of low income and the prescription prepayment certificate scheme, ensure that no one need forgo any necessary medication on financial grounds. As a result, less than one item in five dispensed in the NHS currently attracts a charge.

Cancer Treatments

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by directly managed unit and by trust unit the waiting list for cancer treatment as at December 1991 in *(a)* the South West regional health authority and *(b)* Wessex regional health authority.

Mr. Waldegrave: Waiting list information is collected centrally by specialty, not by diagnosis of patient. At 31 March 1991, the latest date for which specialty information is available, there were 38 patients waiting for radiotherapy in the South Western regional health authority and one patient waiting in the Wessex regional health authority.

I understand that there are no patients waiting for radiotherapy treatment at the Royal United hospital, Bath.

Pets (Cancer Treatment)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the revenue generated by the Bath Royal United hospital from the treatment of domestic pets in its cancer treatment unit in 1991-92.

Mr. Waldegrave: This is a matter for Bath Royal United hospital.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he gave his consent to the Bath Royal United hospital to treat domestic pets in its cancer treatment unit.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Royal United hospital is not required to seek my permission to treat domestic pets in its cancer treatment unit. The scheme was considered by the hospital's medical committee, and discussed with the community health council, which gave approval provided that patient care was unaffected and there were no costs to the NHS.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what conditions he imposed on the Bath Royal United hospital when he agreed to its treatment of domestic pets in the hospital's cancer treatment unit.

Mr. Waldegrave: This matter was decided by the authorities in the hospital after discussion with the local community health council.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he consulted with the Bath community health council on the request from Bath Royal United hospital to treat domestic pets in the hospital's cancer treatment unit.

Mr. Waldegrave: I understand that the Royal United hospital discussed the scheme with Bath community health council who stated that, provided patient care was unaffacted and there were no costs to the NHS, it would raise no objection.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he consulted with the purchasing authority in Bath on the request from Bath Royal United hospital to treat domestic pets in the hospital's cancer treatment unit.

Mr. Waldegrave: This is not a proper matter for central decision, but for the hospital authorities after discussion with the community health council.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his written reply to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) *Official Report*, 20 January, column *85*, he will make it his policy to publish the requested information upon the receipt of the returns from electoral registration officers on 16 February.

Mr. Dorrell: The OPCS intends to publish a monitor containing all district electorate figures before the local government elections in May; a second monitor will be published before the forthcoming general election containing as many parliamentary electorate figures as have been collected and verified.

Bradford Action on Health

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to allocate additional funding to Bradford Action on Health.

Mr. Dorrell: Bradford Action on Health is jointly funded by the Health Education Authority and Bradford health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Donald Maitland, the chairman of the Health Education Authority, and Mr. Nerurkar, the chairman of Bradford health authority.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with agencies concerned with the personal social services with regard to proposals for a general social services council to set standards and regulate those working in this sector.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: An independent action group convened by the National Institute for Social Work is currently considering all aspects of the proposals for a general social services council. That action group will be consulting widely with interested organisations before reaching its conclusions and presenting recommendations. We await the report with interest.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications for statutory provisions of the cutting or freezing of local authority personal social service budgets during the next financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The standard spending figure for personal social services for 1992-93 is £4,850 million, about 6 per cent. higher than local authorities' social services budgets for the current year. Personal social services standard spending has increased by 33 per cent. over two years.

Child Abuse

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to local authorities with regard to the allocations of complex child abuse cases to newly qualified social workers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Social service departments should ensure that staff undertaking this work are trained, competent and supervised. The Department has reissued "Working Together", a guide to arrangements for inter-agency co-operation for the protection of children, to coincide with the implementation of the Children Act 1989 on 14 October 1991. The training guidelines "Working with child sexual abuse" circulated on 6 January give a framework for training in this area. Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has received from the social services inspectorate with regard to the possible introduction of approved or accredited social workers for child protection cases; what response he has made to these proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Tobacco

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek to revise the voluntary agreements with tobacco companies on promotion of tobacco products to include a prohibition on the distribution of free cigarettes to young people in nightclubs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Committee for Monitoring the Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship—COMATAS—has considered complaints relating to such activities, and is satisfied that the conduct of those promotions it has examined complied with the terms of the voluntary agreement. The promotional team may only offer cigarettes to smokers over 18 years old, and the venues are licensed premises where under-18s are excluded by management. If the hon. Member has any evidence to the contrary, the committee would be pleased to examine it.

Psychiatric Patients

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is given to regional health authorities and trusts with regard to charging *(a)* psychiatric in-patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 or *(b)* other psychiatric patients for damage caused by them to hospital property during periods of illness.

Mr. Dorrell: No central guidance has been issued.

Westwood Hospital

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information about the proposed closure of Westwood hospital was given to the local community as part of the consultation process about the establishment of the Bradford community health trust.

Mr. Dorrell: No reference was made to the closure of Westwood hospital in the application for the establishment of Bradford community health trust.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who owns the land on which Westwood hospital is located; who are the freeholders; and if any part of the land is leased.

Mr. Dorrell: Ownership of Westwood hospital and the land on which it is sited is vested in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, for health services purposes. It is occupied and managed by Bradford health authority. Part of the land is leased for minor grazing and sports purposes.

Means Testing

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to monitor the legality and fairness of the methods of means testing used by local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for local authority social services departments to act within the relevant legislation and take into account any guidance issued. Since April 1991 they have been required to establish procedures for dealing with complaints. New guidance about charges for personal social services is being prepared.

Policy Forum Report

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he has made to the first report of the policy forum entitled "Great Expectations and Spending on Social Services", a copy of which has been sent to him.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This report rightly points out the increase in public expectations of social services as a result of important recent legislation: the Children Act

1989 and community care. Local authorities have a challenging job to provide services which are flexible, comprehensive and sensitive to the needs of users and carers.

As the burden has increased, so have the resources available. Over the last two years alone, the standard spending for social services has increased by 33 per cent. Since 1979, spending in real terms has increased by 60 per cent. An extra 3,500 social workers have been recruited in the last six years alone.

The centre produces guidance, legislation and resources. Local authorities rather than central Government have the direct responsibility for providing social services for their population. It is for local authorities in carrying out their responsibilities to judge priorities in the context of local circumstances.

Accident and Emergency Services

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the provision of accident and emergency services in the North Western and Merseyside regional health authority areas; what guidance he gives to regional health authorities on this subject; and what steps he takes to monitor this service.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* Health authorities are responsible for assessing the need for accident and emergency services in their local area and for securing the necessary services through health service contracts.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Drug Smuggling

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps he is taking to protect the non-port areas of East Anglian coastline from drug smuggling after 1 January 1993; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list, by drug, all seizures made by Customs and Excise coming through East Anglian ports for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make a statement on how he proposes to prevent drugs being brought freely into East Anglian ports after 1 January 1993;

(4) if he will make a statement on the levels of manpower and resources he plans to make available for Customs and Excise activities against drug smuggling into East Anglia after 1 January 1993.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* The drugs threat to the United Kingdom is well illustrated in national statistics issued by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at the beginning of this year showing that drugs seizures by Customs continue to increase. In particular they show an increase of 89 per cent. in cocaine and 478 per cent. in synthetic drugs.

A total of 62 per cent. of all seizures, by weight, came from or through another European Community member state, representing drugs to a value of almost £82 million.

East Anglia's proximity to the European mainland and also its facilities for deep sea traffic place it in the forefront of the fight against drugs from both EC and non-EC sources.

The table lists all customs' drug seizures in East Anglia between 1987 and 1991.

Type		*Weight*	*Value (£)*
Amphetamine			
	1987	986 gms	76,948
	1988	4,970 gms	605,644
	1989	9,830 gms	1,129,185
	1990	6,024 gms	296,811
	1991	19,244 gms	2,019,196
Cannabis			
	1987	1,297,134 gms	2,894,133
	1988	3,608,209 gms	9,536,741
	1989	7,402,013 gms	22,550,125
	1990	8,082,799 gms	24,248,397
	1991	4,047,166 gms	11,186,690

Type		*Weight*	*Value (£)*
Cocaine			
	1987	120 gms	16,380
	1988	1 gm	85
	1989	23,082 gms	3,855,724
	1990	5,633 gms	735,354
	1991	3,320 gms	337,611
Diamorphine (Heroin)			
	1987	1,381 gms	160,060
	1988	1 gm	110
	1989	1,543 gms	158,160
	1990	24,625 gms	2,216,250
	1991	16,021 gms	1,090,962

Type		*Weight*	*Value (£)*
Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD)			
	1987	635 tablets	2,108
	1988	962 tablets	2,883
	1989	9,341 tablets	30,993
	1990	5,863 tablets	19,700
	1991	40,686 tablets + 45 gms	128,865

Type		*Weight*	*Value (£)*
Methylenedioxyamphetamine Derivatives MDA, MDMA (Ecstacy)			
	1987	Nil	—
	1988	Nil	—
	1989	2,413 gms + 318 tablets	209,305
	1990	540 tablets	19,700
	1991	2,516 gms + 102,500 tablets	2,160,973
Other – (Various)			
	1987	60 gms	3
	1988	6 gms	12
	1989	64 gms	5,476
	1990	11 gms	3,198
	1991	98 gms	67,795

On the completion of the single market on 1 January 1993, while all fiscal and customs formalities at EC frontiers will be removed, permitting the freest movement of legitimate passenger and freight traffic, essential anti-smuggling checks will remain. These will be focused on major dangers to society such as drugs, instruments of terrorism and child pornography and will be performed in a carefully targeted manner by flexible and mobile teams.

In East Anglia 275 staff will be available on 1 January 1993 for this role involved in information and intelligence gathering; the evaluation of risk; flexible deployments to counter the risk at ports, airports, airfields, along the

coastline and at every conceivable entry point. Those numbers can also be supplemented by additional resources from elsewhere as the need arises.

These staff will be conducting highly selective checks, relying on improved intelligence assessments and closer co-operation with businesses and with enforcement agencies overseas in a continuing effort to counter those serious threats to society.

The coastline of East Anglia, as with the rest of the United Kingdom, is covered by Customs maritime and aerial resources, often in close co-operation with the police. In addition, national and international intelligence-led operations against targeted small craft are a regular occurrence, including traffic destined for the east coast from the Netherlands. Customs are developing an air/sea anti-drugs memoranda of understanding programme with other maritime countries. A draft agreement with Dutch law enforcement agencies has been agreed and will be signed soon.

SCOTLAND

Research and Development

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide total Government spending on research and development in Scotland in constant terms in each year since 1973-74.

Mr. Lang: The information available is set out in the table below. It is an abstract from table 1.2.2 of the current version of the "Annual Review of Government Funded R & D 1991"—published by HMSO and available in the Library. Section 2.22 of that annual review contains a detailed description of the related activities funded by the Scottish Office. In addition, there is considerable spending by other Government Departments—such as the Department of Education and Science—in Scotland and by the research councils.

£ million in real terms (base year 1989-90) full economic cost

Outturn	(Estimated Figures)
	£ million
1981-82	63·1
1982-83	61·8
1983-84	68·3
1984-85	70·0
1985-86	67·0
1986-87	64·3
1987-88	59·0
1988-89	58·8
1989-90	59·1
1990-91	58·2
1991-92	57·7
1992-93	53·5
1993-94	53·4

Grant-aided Colleges

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has determined the allocations of grant-in-aid for recurrent expenditure to grant-aided colleges in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The allocations are:

	Offer[1] 1992-93 financial year (£ million)
Craigie College of Education	1·416
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	3·470
Dundee Institute of Technology	6·720
Edinburgh College of Art	3·167
Glasgow Polytechnic	15·827
Glasgow School of Art	3·112
Jordanhill College of Education	7·671
Moray House College of Education	6·161
Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh	19·360
Northern College of Education	4·516
Paisley College of Technology	10·546
Queen's College, Glasgow	4·391
Queen Margaret College	4·606
Robert Gordon Institute of Technology	11·632
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	2·160
St. Andrew's College of Education	2·968
Scottish College of Textiles	2·163

[1] The offers are conditional on parliamentary approval of the Supply Estimates and take account of the increases in the tuition fees which colleges will receive for undergraduate students.

These allocations reflect the very high priority which the Government are continuing to give to higher education, and will provide more opportunities for people wishing to enter higher education. The number of students for whom grant provision has been made has been increased by nearly 8½ per cent. in 1992-93 in recognition of the success of the sector in attracting additional students. After including the higher levels of tuition fees to be paid to colleges in 1992-93, the allocations represent an increase in Government funding of about £19 million; or about 12 per cent. compared with the current year if colleges achieve their funded student enrolments. Changes in the recurrent resourcing of individual colleges are shown below.

Year-on-year comparison of grant-in-aid and tuition fees

	Grant-in-aid[1] plus estimated tuition fees for funded students		
	1991-92 £ million	1992-93 £ million	Change Percentage
Craigie CE[2]	1·741	2·169	+24·6
Duncan of Jordanstone	5·797	6·495	+12·0
Dundee Institute	10·469	11·453	+9·4
Edinburgh College of Art	5·494	6·049	+10·1
Glasgow Polytechnic	22·276	25·296	+13·6
Glasgow School of Art	5·005	5·824	+16·4
Jordanhill CE	10·369	10·991	+6·0
Moray House CE	8·031	8·513	+6·0
Napier Polytechnic	27·251	30·868	+13·3
Northern CE	5·909	6·264	+6·0
Paisley College	15·611	17·907	+14·7
Queen's College, Glasgow	6·212	7·320	+17·8
Queen Margaret College	7·109	7·916	+11·4
Robert Gordon Institute	17·814	20·138	+13·0
RSAMD	3·100	3·286	+6·0
St. Andrews CE	4·024	4·286	+6·5
Scottish College of Textiles	3·363	3·673	+9·2
Total	159·575	178·448	+11·8

[1] Because of changes to the treatment and coverage of in-service provision, resources for in-service have been excluded from both years.

2. In 1992-93 Craigie College of Education will introduce courses in secondary postgraduate teacher training and will be funded for these. This is the main reason for the very high increase in resources for 1992-93: if this funding is excluded, the increase in resources is about 7 per cent.

The distribution of resources among colleges generally reflects the ability of individual colleges to enrol additional students, and in the case of teacher training it is based on the need for newly qualified teachers. The highest increase in resources on a like with like basis is 18 per cent. for Queen's college, Glasgow, reflecting particularly strong growth in student numbers. Twelve of the 17 colleges are estimated to receive increases in resources of over 9 per cent.—which is more than twice the projected rate of inflation.

For each college, the funding level will adequately cover cost increases, and will enable the colleges to continue to contribute to the rising participation in higher education in recent years.

Scottish Estates

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is Highland and Islands Enterprise's preferred strategy for the future management and development of Scottish estates.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* I have asked the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Fishing and Shooting Estates

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the owners of the Scottish fishing and shooting estates listed in the publication "Sport at Home and Abroad, 1992 Season", by Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* I have asked the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

"Sport at Home and Abroad"

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what was the nature and scale of the assistance given by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to the publication "Sport at Home and Abroad, 1992 Season"; and if the recipients of such assistance will be required to repay all or part of the assistance if the project is commercially successful;

(2) what are the benefits he expects to accrue for the people and the economy of the highlands and islands from Highlands and Islands Enterprise's assistance to the publication of "Sport at Home and Abroad, 1992 Season"; and how such assistance contributes to Highlands and Islands Enterprise's strategic objectives for the highlands and islands;

(3) how he expects assistance given by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to the publication "Sport at Home and Abroad, 1992 Season" to contribute to the economic development of the highlands and islands.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* I have asked the chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise to write to the hon. Member.

Libya (Lockerbie)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what communications the Lord Advocate has received from the Libyan authorities concerning the warrant issued in respect of the bombing of Pan Am flight 103; what reply he has sent; and if he will place a copy of the correspondence in the Library.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The terms of diplomatic notes are confidential. However, the Libyan authorities have made public the fact of their request that the Lord Advocate assist a Libyan judicial investigation. The Lord Advocate has made it clear that he is not prepared to co-operate in such an investigation, for reasons which are obvious from the terms and nature of the charges as announced by the Lord Advocate on 14 November. The matter has been investigated fully, leading to the issue of judicial warrants in Scotland and the United States. It is now up to the Libyan authorities to comply with our requests as endorsed by Security Council resolution 731 (1992).

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 29 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Industrial Diseases

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Attorney-General what files held at the Public Records Office relating to the operation and enforcement of the 1931 Asbestos Regulations, or other relevant health and safety legislation, or other forms of regulation of the asbestos industry, are still closed, other than under the 30-year rule.

The Attorney-General: The Public Record Office holds Home Office and Ministry of Labour headquarters records concerning the work of the factory inspectorate in operating and enforcing factory and safety legislation, including the Asbestos Industry Regulations 1931. Very few local and individual case records of the inspectorate, for the period up to 1961, have been selected for permanent preservation. None of the records identified above have been closed for longer than 30 years.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Attorney-General what files held at the Public Records Office relating to compensation for asbestos-related disease under the industrial injuries scheme or its predecessors, or to the workings of the pneumoconiosis medical boards and panels, are still closed, other than under the 30-year rule.

The Attorney-General: Records of the Home Office and of the Ministry of National Insurance and its successors relating to workmen's compensation schemes and to the industrial injuries scheme introduced in 1946 are held by the Public Record Office. The records of the Ministry of National Insurance include records of the Pneumoconiosis and Byssinosis Benefits Board. Records among those described above which contain medical details or information relating to the personal circumstances of identifiable individuals are closed for longer than 30 years under the provisions of section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958, the period of closure depending upon the ages of the persons concerned.

Default Cases

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average number of default cases processed per hour using county court default systems, up to and including the making of instalment orders.

The Attorney-General: Throughout the county court system in England and Wales approximately 1,800 summonses were issued per working hour in 1991. Some of these would have resulted in payment at the issue stage, some would have resulted in judgment by default, some would have resulted in orders for judgment by instalments, and others would have been defended on their merits. Statistics as to the outcome of cases are not collected in this form.

TRANSPORT

Radioactive Materials (Transport)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East on plutonium transport, 20 January, *Official Report*, column *63*, he will set out the categories of cases where movements of radioactive materials have to be notified by his Department;

(2) in cases of the movement of radioactive materials, which Government Departments have to be notified; and in what sets of circumstances.

Mr. McLoughlin: Consignments of radioactive material which must be notified to the Department of Transport before each shipment are:

Type B(U) packages containing radioactive material with an activity greater than 3×10^3 A1 or 3×10^3 A2, as appropriate, or 1000 terabecquerels (20 kilocuries), whichever is the lower;

Type B(M) packages;

transport under Special Arrangement.

The terms used are defined in International Atomic Agency safety series No. 6: "Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material", a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

An export licence must be obtained from the Department of Trade and Industry for the export of radioactive materials specified in the Export of Goods (Control) Order.

A40(M)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the road works on Westway and the A40(M) in Paddington to be completed; what work will have been done and at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Phase I of the rewaterproofing of the A40(M) Westway, which started in September 1991, should be completed by the end of February 1992, providing there are no periods of adverse weather. By then, almost three fifths of Westway will have been rewaterproofed and resurfaced. The estimated cost of phase I is £4·25 million.

Phase II is planned to start in June 1992 and take about five months. It will complete the resurfacing of Westway and include the rewaterproofing of the A40(M)/M41 roundabout and the Wood lane flyover.

When the works are completed, major resurfacing on Westway will not be necessary for many years, and the waterproofing should last for at least 20 years.

Cornelis Johanna

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *270*, when the inclining experiment will be carried out on the Cornelis Johanna.

Mr. McLoughlin: Arrangements are being made to conduct the inclining experiment as soon as possible.

Motorway Accidents

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 17 January, *Official Report*, column *656*, on research undertaken into accidents

caused by motorists falling asleep, whether any of the research has been funded or commissioned by Her Majesty's Government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Loughborough study was not funded by the Government.

The Welsh Office however has funded a study by Bangor university of driver fatigue, the report of which, "The Long-Distance Driver", was published in 1990.

Driver fatigue was one of the elements of the extensive programme of accident causation studies carried out by the Department's Transport and Road Research Laboratory during the 1970s and early 1980s.

In order to assess future research needs, my Department has commissioned a further review of research from the medical commission on accident prevention at the Royal College of Surgeons.

Roads Programme, North-West

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the expected central Government expenditure on the roads programme in the North-West in 1991-92 and in each of the following five years.

Mr. Chope: The forecast outturn roads programme expenditure in the Department's north-west region in 1991-92 is £174 million. This includes new construction and maintenance. The budget for next year—1992-93—has not yet been finalised. Expenditure in subsequent years is dependent on future public expenditure settlements.

Speed Limit Enforcement

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many automatic speed limit enforcement equipment experiments are being conducted in Britain; and if he will make a statement on their effectiveness and the proposals he may have for extending the schemes.

Mr. Chope: Small-scale trials are being carried out to test the equipment and evaluate its operational use in enforcing speed limits. When suitable equipment has been granted type approval by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, it will be deployed more widely and its effectiveness in reducing accidents will be evaluated by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory.

Vehicle Registration

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the 10-day time limit for transferring registration of motor vehicles; if he will make it his policy to ensure that any vehicle requiring transfer of registration be subject to the signature of the registered owner; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The 10-day delay period applies where there is a doubt about the propriety of the transfer application, and is intended to assist in the detection of car-related crime. There are about 1·9 million applications for change of registration each year and it would be impracticable to require the signature of the registered keeper before allowing any change.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications to transfer registration documents have been made under form V712/1 to DVLC Swansea in respect of stolen vehicles.

Mr. Chope: About 10,000 V712 letters are issued weekly by DVLA. Since the system was introduced in 1986 more than 1,200 arrests have been made and more than 3,400 stolen vehicles recovered as a direct result of this procedure.

Safety Belts

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people in the rear of motor vehicles and wearing lap seat belts only have been killed and injured, respectively, in the United Kingdom, during the past five years for which records are available.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not available.

A38

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will announce his Department's preferred route for the A38 trunk road improvement between Liskeard and Bodmin.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* I have written to my hon. Friend.

ENVIRONMENT

Dockland Forum

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the period over which the London Docklands development corporation has funded the Dockland Forum; if he has given any instructions or advice concerning its continuation in the financial year 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The LDDC has approved grant aid to Docklands Forum over the period 1982-1992. The LDDC has advised the forum that this grant aid will come to an end in March 1992.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to phase out the disposal of all types of waste in the sea.

Mr. Baldry: Dumping of solid waste at sea is a matter for my right hon. Friend, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Dumping of sewage sludge at sea will be phased out by the end of 1998. The United Kingdom is voluntarily refraining from dumping radioactive waste at sea. All waste water discharges in England and Wales are subject to regulation by the appropriate regulatory authorities. They must meet specified international and domestic standards and may be subject to conditions to ensure that those standards are met, so that discharges do not cause unacceptable harm to the environment.

Water Contractors

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to bring forward proposals to require contractors undertaking work on behalf of water companies to maintain the same standards as the water companies are required to maintain in order to prevent environmental damage and pollution.

Mr. Baldry: Every company holding an appointment as a water or sewerage undertaker has in place a code of practice, approved by the Secretary of State, covering the use of its works powers on private land. These codes apply equally to any employees, agents and contractors carrying out works on behalf of the company, and cover environmental considerations and reinstatement among other matters. An undertaker may be liable to pay compensation for damage caused in the carrying out of its works, either by itself or by contractors acting on its behalf; and the Director General of Water Services can direct it to do so in a particular case. Other environmental legislation also generally applies in the same way to a water, or water and sewerage, company and to contractors working for it.

Rural Development Commission

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now set out the basis on which the Rural Development Commission will receive Government funding after the programme of workshop sales has been completed.

Mr. Trippier: We recognise the one-off nature of the portfolio disposal receipts. We will take this into account in deciding the basis of the Rural Development Commission funding in future years.

Canada Geese

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is issued to local authorities regarding the humane control of Canada geese; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Subject to the requirements of the EC birds directive and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, it is for the local authorities who wish to control Canada geese to decide what methods may be appropriate, but they can seek technical advice from the Agricultural Development Advisory Service—ADAS—or English Nature.

National Parks

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the budget for each of the national parks over the last 10 years, giving the percentage increase for each year over the previous year, including an overall figure for the whole period, together with the rate of inflation over the same period.

Mr. Baldry: National parks supplementary grant—NPSG—meets 75 per cent. of national parks' approved expenditure, the balance being funded by each park's constituent county and metropolitan district councils. Information on NPSG allocated to each of the English national parks for the financial years 1983-84 to 1992-93 and the percentage increase each year over the previous year together with the inflation rate for the period is given in the table:

National Parks supplementary grant

	Dartmoor	*Exmoor*	*Lake District*	*Northumberland*	*North Yorkshire Moors*	*Peak District*	*Yorkshire Dales*	*England*	*Inflation rate (GDP deflator)*
1983-84 £'000s	597·8	492·8	1,048·7	343·1	631·1	1,492·3	659·2	5,265·0	100
1984-85 £'000s	630·1	505·6	1,104·9	353·3	661·6	1,566·3	678·2	5,500·0	105
Percentage increase	5·4	2·6	5·4	3·0	4·8	5·0	2·9	4·5	—
1985-86 £'000s	663·0	538·9	1,179·8	379·4	706·3	1,664·4	713·2	5,845·0	111
Percentage increase	5·2	6·6	6·8	7·4	6·8	6·3	5·2	6·3	—
1986-87 £'000s	747·4	615·4	1,279·5	405·4	776·5	1,828·6	777·2	6,430·0	114
Percentage increase	12·7	14·2	8·5	6·8	9·9	9·9	9·0	10·0	—
1987-88 £'000s	861·7	721·7	1,431·0	446·2	884·2	2,051·2	888·0	7,284·0	121
Percentage increase	15·3	17·3	11·8	10·1	13·9	12·2	14·2	13·3	—
1988-89 £'000s	991·3	809·0	1,567·4	507·8	990·0	2,231·6	1,031·9	8,129·0	129
Percentage increase	15·0	12	9·5	13·8	12·0	8·8	16·2	11·6	—
1989-90 £'000s	1,116·8	916·0	1,741·7	560·2	1,111·9	2,461·9	1,155·5	9,064·0	138
Percentage increase	12·7	13·2	11·1	10·3	12·3	10·3	12·0	11·5	—
1990-91 £'000s	1,237·3	1,012·3	1,932·9	610·5	1,231·7	2,685·3	1,260·0	9,970·0	149
Percentage increase	10·8	10·5	11·0	9·0	10·8	9·1	9·0	10·0	—
1991-92 £'000s	1,481·9	1,217·4	2,311·9	734·6	1,486·3	3,261·2	1,514·7	12,008·0	160
Percentage increase	19·8	20·3	19·6	20·3	20·7	21·4	20·2	20·4	—
1992-93 £'000s	1,728·7	1,451·2	3,415·5	881·3	1,783·5	3,921·0	1,818·8	15,000·0	167
Percentage increase	16·7	19·2	47·7	20·0	20·0	20·2	20·1	24·9	—

Defective Housing

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council-owned properties within Easington have structural defects which would qualify under the defective housing regulations.

Mr. Yeo: Easington district council reports ownership of 133 dwellings designated as inherently defective under the housing defects legislation.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many homeowners in Peterlee who live in homes which have structural and design defects have been successful in obtaining grants to repair such defects.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not available.

Housing Investment Programme, Easington

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by year since 1985 the housing investment programme bid by Easington district council to his Department and the housing investment programme allocation for each of those years.

Mr. Yeo: The table provides the information requested.

	HIP bid	*HIP allocation £ thousands*	*EA allocation*
1985-86	17,420	4,525	—
1986-87	20,952	3,860	—
1987-88	n/a	3,632	—
1988-89	n/a	3,894	433,218
1989-90	24,417	3,197	391,988
New capital finance system[1]			
1990-91	33,892	4,731	12,000
1991-92	33,137	[2]5,585	393,000
1992-93	27,556	[2]6,205	460,000

[1] Under the new capital finance system, introduced in 1990-91, the HIP allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly.

[2] These figures are not final. Additional supplementary credit approvals are expected to be issued in the course of each financial year.

Since 1981-82 authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their HIP allocations by using the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts.

Noise

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what questions he has received about the number of environmental health officers employed by local authorities to combat noise nuisance between neighbours.

Mr. Baldry: I have received no specific questions on this. Local environmental health officers carry out a wide range of functions and I am aware that the number of complaints to local authorities about neighbourhood noise is increasing. However, it remains for each local authority to determine its own priorities in deploying its environmental health officers, having regard to their statutory duties under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the available resources and needs of their community.

Non-statutory action, such as dispute mediation by third parties and community codes on noise behaviour, may help to relieve the pressure on environmental health officers and also achieve a more effective and longer lasting solution. My Department is therefore part-funding a mediation scheme in Bristol. We are also funding a pilot neighbourhood noise awareness scheme in Forest Hill, London. The scheme incorporates a community code suggesting ways of keeping noise down and being a considerate neighbour.

Overcrowding

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received requesting changes in planning regulations to restrict or further regulate alleged overcrowding in privately rented accommodation.

Mr. Yeo: Under part X of the Housing Act 1985 a person who permits a dwelling to be overcrowded commits a criminal offence. The enforcement duty lies with local authorities.

Authorities also have discretionary powers to control overcrowding in houses in multiple occupation by serving notice requiring the number of people accommodated to be reduced.

The control of overcrowding in dwellings is not a matter for the planning system, and I am not aware of any recent representations that it should be.

Mortgage Repossessions

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the cost to local authorities of homelessness for reasons of mortgage repossessions for each year 1979 to 1991, inclusive.

Sir George Young: The information available to the Department about local authorities' costs associated with homelessness is not broken down according to the cause.

3D Ltd.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the application for city grant by 3D Ltd. for the west end scheme in Bradford has been completely considered; whether a decision has been made; and what section of the scheme is under consideration.

Mr. Key: My Department received a revised application for city grant from 3D on 15 October 1991. It relates to a first phase of the west end scheme, comprising offices in Aldermanbury, a European pavilion and a multi-storey car park. Several meetings have been held with the applicants, but additional information is awaited before a decision can be made.

Arthur Ford Ltd.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from Arthur Ford Ltd. of Nottingham regarding its loss on a departmental contract where the original contractor has gone into receivership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* Arthur Ford Ltd. was a sub-contractor on Turriff Ltd. on a project which the Property Services Agency is managing on behalf of the Ministry of Defence at RAF Cosford. It has made representations to PSA concerning moneys owed to it by Turriff which is now in receivership.

Councillors (Allowances)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the increase in the allowance to members serving on local authorities will be made; and what will be the total increase.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* We are currently reviewing the spending limits on allowances paid by local authorities and will let them know shortly the limits which will apply from 1 April 1992.

THE ARTS

Japan Festival

Mr. Grist: To ask the Minister for the Arts which events in the Japan festival 1991 he attended in his official capacity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I attended the following events:

28 August 1991: "Contemporary Art from Japan" Exhibition at the Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh;
16 September 1991: The Royal Opening of the Japan Festival at the Victoria and Albert Museum;
16 September 1991: The "Visions of Japan" Exhibition, also at the Victoria and Albert Museum;
17 September 1991: The Royal Opening of the Kamakura Exhibition at the British Museum;
22 October 1991: The exhibition "Japan and Britain: An Aesthetic Dialogue 1850-1930" at the Barbican.

I also attended receptions for sponsors at Lancaster House and in Cardiff and Newcastle. The Japan Festival 1991 has been the largest celebration of another country's culture ever held in the United Kingdom.

The festival has attracted very wide support, and hundreds of highly successful and varied events have taken place nationwide. It will, I am sure, make a valuable and lasting contribution to relations between our two countries and to the understanding and appreciation of Japanese culture in the United Kingdom.

ENERGY

Plutonium

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column 7, if he will now provide details on the amount of plutonium offered to Euratom on the United Kingdom's accession to the treaty of Rome on 1 January 1973; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Refuseniks

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Ukraine authorities about their failure to grant an exit visa to Motvei Goishpan of Kharkov and to Vladimir Kofman of Kiev.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We can certainly raise the cases of refuseniks Motvei Goishpan of Kharkov and Vladimir Kofman of Kiev with the Ukrainian authorities, but in order to make our representations most effective we shall need further details.

Treaty of Rome

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer of 21 January, *Official Report*, column *101*, to the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell), what discrepancies have been found so far between the treaty text made available to hon. Members on 16 December and the text as prepared for signature; whether any further differences will be laid before the House before signature; and what the process of preparation for signature involves.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The text made available to Parliament on 16 December was in two parts, covering political union and economic and monetary union. In preparing this agreed text for signature these sections have been combined to form a single treaty text, the numbering of the articles of the text has been brought into line with those of the treaty of Rome and translations have been prepared. The final text of the treaty will be made available to Parliament immediately following signature.

East Timor

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he intends to take on the resolutions of the parliamentary assemblies of the Council of Europe and of the Western European Union in respect of East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have noted the resolutions.

Cameroon

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further representations he has made to the Government of Cameroon about human rights.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made representations to the Cameroon Government about human rights on several occasions. The most recent was in October 1991, both in Yaoundé and to the Cameroon ambassador in London. We shall continue to monitor the situation carefully.

Somalia

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonweath Affairs if he will make a statement on the action taken by the United Nations Security Council regarding the situation in Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: On 23 January the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution, No. 733, requesting the secretary general to appoint a co-ordinator to oversee the effective delivery of increased United Nations humanitarian assistance, in liaison with other international agencies. The Security Council also requested the secretary-general to co-operate with the Organisation of African Unity and the League of Arab States in contacting the parties to the Somali conflict to try to secure a ceasefire, the distribution of humanitarian assistance, and a political settlement to the conflict. The Security Council also agreed to an immediate embargo on all deliveries of weapons and military equipment to Somalia.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Armley Prison

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will order an inquiry into Armley prison following the further suicide; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the death of Mr. Melvyn Hodgson at Leeds prison on 28 December last year. I shall decide what form of inquiry into the circumstances may be appropriate, once the inquest into Mr. Hodgson's death has been concluded.

Extradition

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the safeguards and rights of appeal under extradition treaties concluded, to date, by Her Majesty's Government.

Mr. John Patten: The safeguards and rights of appeal are contained in the Extradition Act 1989, particularly parts II and III, and paragraphs 1, 8, and 10 of schedule 1.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with how many countries Her Majesty's Government have *(a)* concluded an extradition treaty, *(b)* is currently negotiating an extradition treaty and *(c)* no extradition treaty or limited extradition arrangements.

Mr. John Patten: *(a)* The United Kingdom has extradition arrangements with the following Commonwealth countries listed in schedule 1 to the Extradition (Designated Commonwealth Countries) Order 1991—1991 No. 1700:

Antigua and Barbuda
Australia
The Bahamas
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Botswana
Brunei
Canada
Dominica
Fiji
The Gambia
Ghana
Grenada
Guyana
India
Jamaica
Kenya
Kiribati
Lesotho
Malawi
Malaysia
Maldives
Malta
Mauritius
Nauru
New Zealand
Nigeria
Papua New Guinea
Saint Christopher and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Solomon Islands
Sri Lanka
Swaziland
Tanzania
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tuvalu
Uganda
Vanuatu
Western Samoa
Zambia
Zimbabwe;

with the parties to the European convention on extradition, listed in schedule 2, part 1 to the European Convention on Extradition Order 1990—1990 No. 1507:

Austria
Cyprus
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany, Federal Republic of
Greece
Iceland
Israel
Italy
Liechtenstein
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey;

and through bilateral treaties, not all of which are currently operative, with the following foreign states:

Albania
Argentina
Belgium
Bolivia
Chile
Colombia
Cuba
Czechoslovakia
Ecuador
Guatemala
Haiti
Iraq
Liberia
Mexico
Monaco
Nicaragua
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Poland
Romania
Salvador
San Marino
Thailand
United States of America
Uruguay
Yugoslavia

Arrangements with the Republic of Ireland are based on the reciprocal backing of warrants.

(b) The possibility of replacing the existing arrangements with India under the Commonwealth scheme with a bilateral treaty will be the subject of official discussions next month.

(c) Limited extradition arrangements exist with some countries not listed in the tables by virtue of the international conventions referred to in section 22(2) of the Extradition Act 1989. I shall write to the hon. Member shortly giving details of the parties to those conventions.

United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he proposes to continue funding the United Kingdom Immigrants Advisory Service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: UKIAS currently receives grant-in-aid so that it may provide advice and representation before the immigration appellate authorities in cases where an application to enter or remain in the United Kingdom or a claim to asylum has been refused. The Government have a high regard for the service which UKIAS's staff provide

to their clients. We are not, however, satisfied with the manner in which UKIAS's general council and executive committee oversee the service and we have repeatedly pressed them to make changes to conform with the standards expected of a body receiving grant-in-aid. In particular, we expect the organisation to become more broadly based, with a wider range of representation. We think that anybody who is paid by UKIAS or otherwise has a personal pecuniary interest in the provision of immigration advice should not be able to serve on the general council or executive committee, and that the role of those committees should be restricted to general policy and senior staff appointments. We also expect UKIAS to account for the funds they receive by improving their corporate planning and performance measurement.

UKIAS has not so far accepted or implemented these changes. On 20 January I met the executive committee to discuss this. I gave notice that the current situation in UKIAS was such that the Government could not properly provide additional funds for the expansion of their refugee unit to meet the extra work created by the increase in asylum applications and the introduction of new rights of appeal in the Asylum Bill. The London representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees who attended the meeting and who hitherto has provided 75 per cent. of the refugee unit's funds, expressed similar concern. The refugee unit now needs to expand without further delay and so that this can proceed both the Government and the UNHCR intend to transfer the funds for refugee work from UKIAS to a new body which will supervise the refugee unit temporarily. The transfer will take place as soon as the new body is established, we hope by the end of February 1992.

I also gave the executive committee notice that continued payment of the grant for general immigration work depended on their making the required changes within three months. If changes are made to meet the conditions we and the London representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have set out, the grant for immigration work will continue and we will discuss the reattachment of the refugee unit to UKIAS. If, however, the necessary changes are not made, we have given notice that we shall feel bound to terminate the grant to UKIAS and fund a new organisation to provide these services.

Derek Bentley

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *315*, if he is now in a position to decide whether any action on his part is appropriate in the case of Derek Bentley.

Mr. Patten: No. The case is receiving careful consideration. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will announce his decision once the review is complete.

Rule 43

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what positive action is being taken by his Department to encourage inmates to return to normal prison location from rule 43; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Detailed guidance was provided to governors in 1990 on the arrangements that should be made for the removal of inmates from association under prison rule 43 and young offender institution rule 46, and for the management of vulnerable prisoners. The White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice"—Cm 1647—presented to Parliament last September, stated that no prisoner should be segregated for longer than is absolutely necessary. It described the development of policies directed to provide a climate in prisons in which inmates could be removed from segregation and located more appropriately. In particular, the Government accepted a proposal in the Woolf report that the existing rules should be amended. Later this year, separate rules will be introduced to make clear the responsibilities and powers of governors in respect of vulnerable prisoners.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider extending the requirement to comply with fire regulations to include all bed-and-breakfast accommodation premises with less than six bed spaces.

Mr. John Patten: Hotels and boarding houses with sleeping accommodation for more than six persons—or with some sleeping accommodation above the first floor or below ground-floor level—require a fire certificate under a designation order made under section 1 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971. We have no plans to designate smaller hotels and boarding houses.

We nevertheless intend to make regulations under section 12 of the Act to implement the fire safety requirements of European Community directives relating to the health and safety of workers at work. These will generally apply to every place in which one or more persons work and will take effect on 1 January 1993.

In accordance with the directives, the regulations will place the primary responsibility for ensuring fire safety on employers. Enforcement of these regulations will be by fire authorities and, for Crown premises, by HM inspectorate of fire services. Detailed consideration is currently being given to how they will be applied to places of work, including bed-and-breakfast accommodation establishments outside the scope of the designated order.

Police Officers (National Memorial)

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up a committee containing representatives of the police throughout the United Kingdom to consider the provision of a national memorial to all police officers who have been killed in the line of police duty in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. The Police Memorial Trust already has approved to erect a memorial to police officers killed on duty in the United Kingdom. The site is at Cambridge green, between Horseguards Parade road and the Mall. Construction work on the memorial, the design for which has been approved by the Royal Fine Arts Commission, is expected to begin later this year.

Assaults on Police

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to make a custodial sentence mandatory for those convicted of inflicting bodily harm on police officers.

Mr. John Patten: The courts have strong powers to deal with those who harm police officers and the Court of Appeal has made it clear that they should use them. We have conducted a six-month survey of the sentences given for assaults against police officers during the period to December 1991. We will consider whether any action is needed in the light of a careful analysis of the results of the survey and will announce our conclusions.

Gatwick Airport

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what notices are displayed by the immigration service at Gatwick airport to identify the channel for passengers holding passports issued by members of the European Community.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Signs directing European Community nationals to the designated area of the immigration arrivals control are provided by Gatwick Airport Limited at 17 locations in the south terminal and four locations in the north terminal.

Prison Officers

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies for prison officers there are at Her Majesty's prisons, Elvert, Durham and Franklands, Durham.

Mrs. Rumbold: In the prison officer class overall Her Majesty's prison Durham has a shortfall of four officers below its target staffing figure of 423 and Her Majesty's prison Frankland has a surplus of three officers above its target staffing figure of 405. Within these totals, there are vacancies at both prisons in the principal, senior officer and hospital officer grades, and there is a vacancy for a principal works officers at Her Majesty's prison Durham.

Crime Prevention, Peterlee

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of funding was granted to the Peterlee sub-division for crime prevention and neighbourhood watch schemes in the years 1985 to 1991.

Mr. John Patten: None. It would not be possible to provide central funds for every local crime prevention initiative. Between 1986 and 1988 a civilian neighbourhood watch assistant in the sub-division was appointed under the community programme. Since January 1991 there has been a similar placement under the employment training programme. I understand from Durham constabulary that local funding of a permanent neighbourhood watch assistant in the area is under consideration.

Passport Applications

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department have received, and on what dates, regarding the passport application of Mrs. M. P. Williams of Blaengwynfi.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The right hon. and learned Member wrote to me on 20 December 1990 concerning Mrs. Williams' eligibility for a passport. He wrote again on 11 November 1991 about the application for citizenship which she lodged on 30 September 1991. I have today written to the right hon. and learned Member about the case.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Dioxins

Mr. Soames: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will be in a position to publish the food surveillance report on dioxins.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased to announce that the report, food surveillance paper No. 31, "Dioxins in Food" is published today.

The key finding is that levels of dioxins in United Kingdom food are so low that only the most sophisticated analytical techniques, capable of measuring accurately to 10 parts in a quadrillion—one thousand million million—can detect them. The report also records that the estimated average intake of dioxins via the diet is less than one quarter of the World Health Organisation tolerable daily intake. Any risk to health from these chemicals in food is therefore likely to be remote.

Other important findings were that levels of dioxins in milk were generally very low, especially at retail level and consumers' intake of dioxins from milk were consequently also low; levels of dioxins in all the samples of fruit, vegetables and eggs were extremely low and intakes from these foods were also very low; levels of dioxins in foods such as meat, fats and oils, and fish were, as expected, slightly higher than in the other foods tested—dioxins are known to accumulate in fatty tissues. Nevertheless, intakes from these products were still less than one tenth of the WHO tolerable daily intake.

The report also presents detailed results of the work carried out on milk from two farms near Bolsover in Derbyshire, previously announced on 26 June 1991, which was found to contain high levels of dioxins. Although retail milk in the area was found to be perfectly acceptable, action was taken last June as soon as the results became available to prevent milk from these premises entering the public supply thereby ensuring that consumers remained fully protected. The results from a special research programme currently being carried out on these farms will be published as soon as the work has been completed.

The report has been considered by independent expert committees, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, and the Food Advisory Committee. These committees welcomed the work carried out, and confirmed the remoteness of any health risk. Surveillance work will, however, continue as recommended by the committees.

Foxes

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the approximate size of the fox population in the United Kingdom; whether the animal carries disease; and what percentage of foxes are killed by hunting, shooting and gassing.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The size of the fox population varies depending on the time of

year, with an estimated 500,000 foxes in England, Scotland and Wales at the end of the summer, falling to 250,000 by the end of winter. Foxes can act as vectors for a number of diseases, most notably rabies on mainland Europe, and also a number of parasites such as Echinococcus granulosus, which can cause hydatid disease in man. It is estimated that 12,500 foxes are killed each year by hunting, while approximately 100,000 are killed by other means, including shooting. No products for gassing foxes are currently approved under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Central Statistical Office

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any plans to introduce charges to users of statistics produced by the Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Maples: The Central Statistical Office is funded by vote to provide certain statistical services to Parliament, Government Departments and international organisations without charge. There is no plan to change these arrangements. The CSO will also continue to charge other users of its statistics in accordance with the policy set out in its agency framework document—paragraph 6.9 and annex F—a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Within the guidelines set out in annex F the CSO will, as stated in paragraph 6.5 of the framework document, explore ways of getting best value out of existing and potential revenue earning activities without detriment to its principal objectives: and that once the key objective of improving the quality and relevance of Government economic statistics has been substantially achieved it will be appropriate to give greater emphasis to increasing revenue.

Excise Duty

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out *(a)* the present rates of excise duty, expressed in ecus, charged by the respective EC member nations on beer, cider, table wine, fortified wine and spirits, *(b)* the agreed reference rates of excise duty on these products and the target dates for convergence by all member nations and *(c)* the changes that would need to be made in United Kingdom excise duties to match the action already taken in Denmark.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is as follows:

(a) Excise Duties in Ecus (latest available)

	Beer (at 12·5 Plato) per hlpa[1]	*Cider (at 5 per cent. abv)*[2] *per hl*	*Wine*	*Spirits per hlpa*[1]
		Table (at 11·5 per cent. abv) per hlpa	*Fortified (at 18 per cent. abv) per hl*	
Belgium	267	4	302	65	1,502
Denmark	1,355	103	1,197	211	3,976
France	55	1	27	179	1,120
Germany	146	26	nil	50	1,242
Greece	126	nil	nil	152	314
Ireland	2,256	21	2,311	387	2,617
Italy	413	nil	nil	16	608
Luxembourg	130	3	123	44	899
Netherlands	493	4	311	67	1,374
Portugal	170	nil	nil	nil	559
Spain	78	nil	nil	34	566
United Kingdom	1,520	29	1,503	293	2,710

[1] Hectolitres of pure alcohol.
[2] Alcohol by Volume.

(b) There are no agreed reference rates as yet. There are no target dates for convergence.

The Danish Government have reduced their excise duties on beer by 10·6 per cent., and on wine by 13·3 per cent. No matching action is required from the United Kingdom.

Golden Shares

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all those companies where the Government retain a golden share together with any restrictions on the use of such shares.

Mr. Maude: The table shows all the companies in which the Government holds special or "golden" shares. The only restriction as to the exercising of the rights attached to a special share is where such a share is time limited. Where this is applicable, the table shows the expiry date on or before which the Government may redeem a special share.

Companies in which special shares are held

Company	*Expiry date*
Cable and Wireless	
Sealink	
BT	
British Aerospace	
VSEL Consortium	
British Gas	
Rolls-Royce	
BAA	
British Steel	31 December 1993
Anglian Water	31 December 1994
Northumbrian Water Group	31 December 1994
North West Water Group	31 December 1994
Severn Trent	31 December 1994
Southern Water	31 December 1994
South West Water	31 December 1994
Thames Water	31 December 1994
Welsh Water	31 December 1994
Wessex Water	31 December 1994
Yorkshire Water	31 December 1994
Mersey Docks and Harbour Company	
Eastern Electricity	31 December 1995

Company	Expiry date
East Midlands Electricity	31 December 1995
London Electricity	31 December 1995
Manweb	31 December 1995
Midlands Electricity	31 December 1995
Northern Electric	31 December 1995
Norweb	31 December 1995
Seeboard	31 December 1995
Southern Electricity	31 December 1995
South Wales Electricity	31 December 1995
South Western Electricity	31 December 1995
Yorkshire Electricity Group	31 December 1995
National Grid Company	
National Grid Holding	
National Power	
PowerGen	
Scottish Power	
Scottish Hydro-Electric	

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claim forms have been received by the deposit protection board from BCCI depositors.

Mr. Maples: As at 24 January 1992, a total of 12,818 forms have been received by the Deposit Protection Board from BCCI depositors.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will state the estimated amount of payments under the deposit protection scheme for the BCCI depositors.

Mr. Maples: The amount which the deposit protection scheme will pay out to BCCI depositors will depend on how many depositors make valid claims under the scheme. The estimated maximum amount of payments would be some £88 million, on the information presently available, if all eligible sterling depositors were to make valid claims against the board.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many forms were sent out to BCCI depositors under the deposit protection scheme.

Mr. Maples: As at 24 January 1992, a total of 39,687 forms have been sent out to BCCI depositors. In addition, 13,676 forms have not yet been dispatched, as no correspondence addresses for depositors were maintained by BCCI, and the depositors have not themselves requested forms.

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Allason: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the level of staffing at Inland Revenue offices in Torbay; and whether there are sufficient personnel to handle inquiries relating to the non-registration for uniform business rate by bed-and-breakfast premises.

Mr. Maude: Staffing levels in the Inland Revenue Valuation Office Agency are considered adequate to meet its statutory duties.

Privatisation

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount of debt written off in privatisations since 1988 giving the figures by company privatised.

Mr. Maude: The table attached shows the debt written off in privatisations since 1988 by company and type of debt.

Debt Written Off in Privatisations Since 1988

Company	Amount £	Type of Debt
British Steel	500,000,000	Public Dividend Capital
British Steel	3,480,000,000	Borrowing under Iron and Steel Act 1982
Water Holding Companies	4,526,069,946	National Loans Fund
Water Holding Companies	447,258,437	Public Works Loan Board
South of Scotland Electricity Board[1]	1,368,390,398	National Loans Fund
	10,321,718,780	

[1] Following reorganisation of the Scottish Electricity Companies prior to privatisation, this debt was transferred to Scottish Nuclear Ltd. and subsequently written off.

Competitive Tendering (Derbyshire)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his answer of 20 January, *Official Report*, column *13*, when he replied to the letter he received; and if he will make a further statement concerning Derbyshire county council's policies on competitive tendering.

Mr. Maude: I have received a letter.

Company Taxation

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Government will start the consultation on the legislation proposed for the tax treatment of groups of companies.

Mr. Maude: The Inland Revenue is today publishing draft clauses on groups of companies that the Government intend to introduce in the next Finance Bill. As I announced on 15 November 1991, the legislation, if passed by Parliament, will be effective from that date. Comments are invited by 28 February. Copies of the draft clauses have been placed in the Library of both Houses of Parliament.

Nurses

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to equalise for VAT purposes the charges made for qualified nurses for in-home care and those made for nurses who are not fully qualified and registered only as carers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer on 28 January 1992]:* The Government keep VAT law under constant review. I would not wish to anticipate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget Statement.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Baltic States

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to extend the application of its know-how funds to new categories of enterprises in the Baltic states.

Mrs. Chalker: There are no immediate plans to extend the know-how fund in the Baltic states beyond the following four priority sectors: food processing and distribution, financial services, small business creation and energy.

Aid

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 20 November, *Official Report*, column *204* and 28 November, *Official Report*, column *583*, what percentage of British aid in 1989 was untied; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My answer to the hon. Member for Workington on 20 November related to total aid commitments. My answer on 28 November related to bilateral aid expenditure. The latest estimate of untied aid as a percentage of total aid commitments for 1989 is 34·8 per cent.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the percentage change in overseas aid was in real terms between 1979 and 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: Gross public expenditure on aid was 17 per cent. lower in real terms in 1990 compared with 1979. However, the aid programme is managed on a financial year basis and patterns of disbursements within financial years may not be reflected in calendar year statistics. Compared with 1979-80 gross public expenditure on aid in 1990-91 was 8 per cent. lower in real terms.

WALES

Business Rates

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he intends to make any adjustments to local authorities' 1990-91 contributions to the Welsh non-domestic rates pool.

Mr. David Hunt: I can confirm that following receipt of audited returns, my Department has written to 33 of the 37 district councils in Wales informing them of the adjustments I will be making to the contributions they made into the non-domestic rates pool during 1990-91. Authorities whose contributions to the pool were too high will receive repayments amounting to some £5,566,030, while authorities whose contributions were too low will be making additional payments amounting to £3,612,501. My Department will be writing to the remaining four district councils once queries associated with their audited returns have been resolved.

Parliamentary approval of this new expenditure is being sought in a spring supplementary estimate on class XVI, vote 11. Pending that approval, expenditure on repayments to local authorities will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has yet completed his review of the role and organisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. I propose an important and powerful role for Her Majesty's Inspectorate—HMI—which takes full account of the distinctive features of the education service in Wales. The Education (Schools) Bill now before Parliament establishes an independent office of Her Majesty's chief inspector—HMCI—of schools for Wales to oversee arrangements for a new system of regular school inspections and to provide me with advice on the quality of education provided by schools and the educational standards achieved by them, and whether the financial resources made available to schools are managed efficiently.

The new arrangements set out in the Education (Schools) Bill give effect to the Government's commitment in the citizens charter, and in the charter for parents in Wales that I published at the end of September, to give parents much more comprehensive and regular information about the standard of education in the schools their children attend. In future all schools will be inspected at regular intervals by inspectors who will be required to be registered for that purpose with HMCI. For the first time, parents will have the right—set out in legislation—to meet those undertaking the inspection and make their own views known. Parents will be sent a summary of the published inspection report; school governors will be required to prepare an action plan in the light of the report, send it to parents and report to parents on the implementation of that action plan. The proposals will lead to published reports on a much larger number of schools and on a much more frequent basis than under current arrangements. Together with the proposals for the publication of comparative information on examination results, attendance rates and the destinations of school leavers, these arrangements will give parents a far better picture of the education available in their locality and enable them to become more effective partners in the education of their children.

HMCI will be able to attach conditions to the registration of inspectors and will also have responsibility for monitoring their performance, approving or providing their training and giving guidance on good practice in school inspection. In addition, HMCI will be required to make an annual report to the Secretary of State, which will be laid before Parliament, and will undertake such other functions in connection with schools as may be assigned to him by the Secretary of State.

The powers available to this new statutory, independent office of HMCI will be considerable. I would expect them to be used to the full to ensure that school inspection in Wales will be of high standard and will reflect and safeguard distinctive features of the education system in Wales, notably Welsh-medium education and the teaching of the Welsh language and Welsh history and culture.

I shall shortly be announcing my intentions as regards the date when the new school inspection arrangements should come into operation in Wales, and also the frequency of inspections, taking account of the timetable for the progressive introduction of delegated budgets for schools and of the arrangements envisaged in England. HMI will continue its programme of inspection of schools until such time as the new arrangements come into effect.

The Education (Schools) Bill makes provision for HMI to have a continuing role in the direct inspection of schools in England and Wales. I believe this role to be important, especially in the initial stages of the new arrangements, in setting high standards of inspecting and reporting,

monitoring the work of the new inspection agencies and providing a valuable source of evidence for advising on the maintenance of educational standards. HMI will also continue to inspect independent schools and advise me on schools that give cause for complaint in both the public and independent sectors.

The Further and Higher Education Bill provides for the transfer of important responsibilities in relation to further education, including quality assurance, to a Further Education Funding Council and it will be for the council to decide how to obtain the quality assessment services it will require; provision is being made in the Bill to enable it to obtain those services from HMCI if it wishes to do so. In view of the small numbers of staff involved in Wales and the consequent need for the maximum flexibility of operation, such an arrangement would offer clear advantages. The Bill provides for HMCI to undertake inspections of local authority maintained and assisted institutions providing further education courses, including adult education courses, and to provide me with advice. The Bill also provides that quality assessment in higher education should become the responsibility of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. Consequently, HMI will cease to inspect most areas of provision in this sector. However, they will continue to inspect initial teacher training and provide advice to the Secretary of State based on their reports.

I am strengthening the independence of HMI by creating a separate department headed by HMCI. HMI will no longer be members of the Welsh Office but will remain civil servants, retaining their existing terms and conditions of service. In the past the close working relationship between HMI and the Welsh Office Education Department has ensured that I have received the best possible advice based on up-to-date assessments of what schools and colleges are doing. HMI will continue to provide such advice for the benefit of all working in education in Wales.

Overall the new arrangements will necessitate a considerable change in the balance of the duties undertaken by HMI. I expect that in due course there will be some overall reduction in the numbers of HMI engaged in work related to schools but it is not possible to be precise at this stage; much will depend upon the rate at which local authority advisory and inspection services are able to adapt to the requirements of the new system, and upon the availability of independent registered inspectors able to work in Wales. I intend to keep the situation under review.

I would like to pay tribute to the work of HMI. They are universally respected as independent arbitrators of educational standards who have a key role to play in the reforms we are introducing in the education field. The new measures I have proposed will strengthen their independence and I know they will respond to the challenge of their new role.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the sectors of activity, in addition to the inspection of schools, of Her Majesty's inspectors of education in Wales; and what is the proportion of their time and resources devoted to each sector.

Sir Wyn Roberts: About 65 per cent. of the time of Her Majesty's inspectorate (Wales) is spent on inspecting and reporting; the remaining 35 per cent. is devoted to advising the Welsh Office/Ministers on current and emerging issues, providing advice to the educational system generally through assessorships, publications and courses/conferences and keeping up to date with educational developments.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in Wales were inspected by Her Majesty's inspectors of education during 1990-91; and how long it would take for all primary and secondary schools to be inspected at the same rate of inspection.

Sir Wyn Roberts: During 1990-91 Her Majesty's inspectorate visited more than 40 per cent. of primary schools and all secondary schools in Wales to inspect some aspect of their provision. These inspections include formal inspections of individual schools, national and county surveys of aspects of education—for example, mathematics, Welsh, English, science and technology—and visits by general inspectors to obtain information and assessments which contribute to the national picture. Each of the 230 secondary schools is thus visited annually and each of the 1,717 primary schools at least once every three years. Of the inspections undertaken in 1990-91, 33 were full inspections of primary schools and six were full inspections of secondary schools.

Pentreclwydau

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will agree the application for grant aid from Ryan Mining International to re-open Pentreclwydau pit in the Vale of Neath in order to fund a new rail link and associated infrastructure to take coal traffic off the highways.

Mr. David Hunt: An in-depth appraisal of Ryan Mining International's application for a freight facilities grant is under way and I shall make my decision when this work has been completed.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications for sheep annual premium scheme allocations completed by farmers in Wales were rejected during 1991 due to the forms being incorrectly completed; what was the total number of appeals submitted as a result of the refusals; and how many of these appeals were successful.

Mr. David Hunt: Of 17,384 claims for sheep annual premium in Wales in 1991, 76 had to be rejected owing to forms being incorrectly completed. The number of appeals submitted as a result is 46. None has been successful to date.

Radon Gas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met representatives from the Institution of Environmental Health Officers to discuss levels of radon gas in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Until the results of the National Radiological Protection Board survey are available such a meeting would be premature. To date the Welsh Office-commissioned survey and that carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board have not revealed any towns or villages in which there may be significant effect on housing arising from radon.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated number of homes in Wales with a radon gas level of 200 bq/m³ or over.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is not possible to estimate the number of homes in Wales with radon levels above 200 bq/m³ until the full results of the National Radiological Protection Board survey are known.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which areas of Wales are covered by the free on demand measurement service for householders in areas with high radon levels; how many applications have been forthcoming under the scheme; and what are the main findings of the research undertaken.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Any householder in Wales concerned about radon can ask for a free measurement. To date, 195 surveys have been requested. The results of the National Radiological Protection Board survey are not yet available.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure that all new houses built in Wales incorporate *(a)* a radon-proof polythene membrane and *(b)* radon sump and extract pump or ventilated subfloor void.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I will consider what measures, if any, may be needed when the full results of the National Radiological Protection Board survey become available.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, North of 20 January, *Official Report*, columns *177-79*, what information he has on *(a)* the cost and *(b)* the length of time required for the completion of a study of the application of de-watering pumps to the reduction of side-effects on property affected by the proposed Cardiff bay barrage.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has no firm views at present on the length of time or cost of this study.

Royal Navy Armaments Depot, Trecwn

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his best estimate of the civilian job losses that will arise in the local community as a consequence of the closure of the Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn; and when these will take place;

(2) what is his estimate of the civilian job losses that will arise in the local community as a consequence of the closure of RAF Brawdy; and when the jobs will go.

Mr. David Hunt: Around 80 direct jobs will be lost at RAF Brawdy and 415 direct jobs are affected at RNAD, Trecwn which is to close in 1996. The wider effects of these decisions will be considered by the task force which I announced on 24 January.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cash contribution currently made to the local economy as a result of the employment provided at the Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn.

Mr. David Hunt: No official estimate is available of the cash contribution of RNAD, Trecwn to the local economy.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the cash contribution currently made to the local economy as a result of the employment provided at RAF Brawdy.

Mr. David Hunt: No official estimate is available of the cash contribution made to the local economy by RAF Brawdy. I am, however, aware that the local authorities and the Transport and General Workers Union published figures in their social and economic study of RAF Brawdy in March last year. This report will be taken into consideration by the task force which I announced on 24 January.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) whether he will take steps to launch an initiative to provide new jobs in the local economy to replace those being lost as a result of the proposed closure of the Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn;

(2) whether he will take steps to launch an initiative to provide new jobs in the local economy to replace those being lost as a result of the proposed closure of RAF Brawdy.

Mr. David Hunt: In the light of the Secretary of State for Defence's announcement on 24 January that RNAD, Trecwn is to be progressively run down and closed in March 1996 and that flying training at RAF Brawdy is to end on 31 August 1992, I have announced that a special task force for the area is to be established with immediate effect. It will be the responsibility of the task force to: consider and make recommendations on short-term measures to alleviate the impact of these decisions; study the economic potential of the area affected, identify its strengths and weaknesses and make recommendations on measures to secure the economic regeneration of the area; seek alternative uses, including possible defence uses, for the site at RAF Brawdy; and to consider alternative uses for the site at RNAD, Trecwn following its closure; and review the co-ordination of the activities and plans of central and local government and of the principal agencies in the area.

In addition, I also propose to chair a strategy group, comprising the chairmen of all the relevant organisations, to launch the task force programme and monitor its progress.

RNAD, Milford

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many jobs were lost to the local area as a result of the closure of the Royal Navy armaments depot, Milford.

Mr. David Hunt: The Ministry of Defence announced in March 1988 that the Royal Navy armaments depot at Milford Haven would be gradually run down and close by March 1991. At the time of the announcement 175 people were employed at the base. Of these, 79 transferred to RNAD, Trecwn; 11 to other Government Departments; 12 were lost through natural wastage and 73 were made redundant.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the financial contribution made by the Royal Navy armaments depot, Milford to the local economy, directly and indirectly *(a)* when operating at its height and *(b)* in the year prior to closure, expressed in 1992 prices.

Mr. David Hunt: I am not aware of any official assessment of the financial contribution made by the RNAD, Milford to the local economy.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he took to launch an initiative to provide new jobs in the local economy to counteract the effect on jobs, the local economy and the local community arising from the closure of the Royal Navy armaments depot, Milford.

Mr. David Hunt: Following the announcement in 1988 that RNAD, Milford Haven would close in 1991, my predecessor met a delegation, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett). Subsequently the Milford Haven business initiative was established under the auspices of the Welsh Development Agency. Under the initiative and assocaited programmes a total of £2·5 million actual and approved expenditure has been spent in the town to date by the WDA on improvements.

Since the depot closed on 31 March 1991, the MOD has sold the site for a variety of industrial and housing purposes, including a £35 million jetty to handle super-tankers for Gulf Oil.

There is also a wide range of measures available through my Department and the other agencies, including the West Wales training and enterprise council which became operational on 27 March last year, to assist those made redundant to secure alternative employment and to stimulate job creation.

Job Losses

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for each of the last four years, each company or organisation which has *(a)* shed jobs or *(b)* closed a unit in Pembrokeshire, together with the number of jobs involved in each case; and what action he has taken to counteract the effects of those specific job losses in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: The number of confirmed redundancies for the last four years for the Haverfordwest, Fishguard and South Pembrokeshire travel-to-work areas are: 113 (1988), 106 (1989), 295 (1990) and 166 in 1991. The details of the individual companies cannot be provided for reasons of confidentiality.

Unemployment rates for the three travel-to-work areas were as follows in December 1985 and December 1991:

	December 1985 Percentage	*December 1991 Percentage*
South Pembrokeshire	20·1	14·8
Haverfordwest	16·8	11·1
Fishguard	14·6	9·2

There is a wide range of measures available through my Department and the other agencies to assist those who are unemployed and to stimulate job creation.

Quangos

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many quangos have been set up in Wales since 9 June 1979; and if he will list each of them with the year in whch they were set up.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 21 January 1992]:* Five non-departmental public bodies have been set up in Wales since 9 June 1979. Their names and the year in which each was set up are shown as follows:

Body	*Year set up*
Welsh National Board for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting	1983
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	1987
Curriculum Council for Wales	1988
Housing for Wales	1989
Countryside Council for Wales	1991

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nominee Shareholdings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to abolish nominee shareholdings.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many registered auditors there are in the United Kingdom; and what information he has on the number of registered auditors in Germany.

Mr. Redwood: At 14 January some 27,800 individuals were registered with supervisory bodies under the Companies Act 1989 as being eligible for appointment as company auditors or responsible for company audit work on behalf of registered audit firms. I understand that there are two categories of auditors in Germany: about 12,000 Wirtschaftspruefer, who audit the accounts of large companies, and about 52,000 Steuerberater, who normally act for individuals and small companies.

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his Department's policy on implementation of the recent EC decision on the level of intervention funding allowed to smaller ships.

Mr. Leigh: Following the decision of the European Commission, notified to member states on 7 January 1992, I have decided to reduce the maximum level of support for large merchant ships from 13 to 9 per cent. with effect from 1 January 1992. I have similarly decided that maximum support for small ships will be reduced from 9 to 4·5 per cent. from the same date. The new levels, which are the maximum permitted by the European Commission are inclusive of shipbuilders relief at 2 per cent. A sliding scale will no longer be applied to applications for aid in respect of small ships. In addition, the United Kingdom definition of "small ship" will be amended to

"a ship costing less than the equivalent of ECU10 million to build"

thus aligning it with the EC definition. Vessels costing less than £1 million will no longer be eligible for shipbuilding intervention fund support.

Privatisation

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give in respect of each privatisation since 1979 *(a)* the loss or profit of each company in the five years prior to privatisation and *(b)* any grants or loans made over the same period.

Mr. Redwood: The figures for the major privatisations undertaken by my Department are as follows:

Rolls-Royce

£ million

	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Profit/(loss)	(93)	(115)	26	81	120
Launch aid (net of receipts)	41·0	64·8	8·2	6·6	7·1
Other grants (including offers)	1·2	8·4	0·2	0	1·3

BT

£ million

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Profit	317	570	936	1,031	990
HMG loans	2,196	2,949	3,057	2,944	2,790
ERDF payments	0	0	4·0	20·2	15·2

Cable and Wireless

£ million

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983
Profit	59·5	61·0	62·0	89·2	156·7
(No grants or loans during the period)					

British Steel

£ million

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Profit/(loss)	(229)	(378)	42	177	419
Grants/subsidies	425	701	565	0	0

Jaguar

£ million

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
Profit/(loss)	(47·3)	(31·7)	9·6	50·0	91·5
(No grants or loans during the period)					

Rover

£ million

	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Profit/(loss)	(73·3)	(125·3)	(455·0)	(9·3)	985·6
(No grants or loans during the period)					

British Aerospace

£ million

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
Profit	71	85	82	120	150
Grants/loans	0·29	40·0	2·9	1·28	1·19
Launch aid (net payments/ (receipts))	(0·4)	(0·4)	(0·4)	(0·4)	46·1

ECGD Insurance Services Group ("ISG")

Prior to privatisation, no separate audited financial statements were prepared for ISG, although some financial details of the ISG business are contained in ECGD's annual trading accounts, copies of which are held in the Libraries of the House.

For the purposes of inviting tenders for ISG, illustrative pro forma financial information concerning the business was compiled by ECGD's accountancy advisers on the sale. Copies of this information were provided to the Library of the House in April and May 1991.

ECGD did not receive grants or loans during the period 1986 to 1991.

Cable and Wireless

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to vary the terms of the golden share he holds in Cable and Wireless.

Mr. Redwood: I have no such plans.

Company Boards

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all those companies where the Government have the right to appoint directors to company boards, and publish a list of all such directors appointed since 1987.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not held centrally.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the number of applications granted for regional selective assistance and total amount of grant allocated in the district of West Lancashire in 1990-91 and 1991-92 to date.

Mr. Leigh: In the financial year 1990-91 the Department made offers totalling £647,000 on six applications for regional selective assistance in the local authority district of West Lancashire. Between 1 April 1991 and 23 January 1992 a further nine offers were made with a total value of £1,006,000.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *243* when the cost per job limit for regional selective assistance was last altered.

Mr. Leigh: The cost per job limit is an administrative criterion which forms part of the terms under which Treasury authority to make financial assistance available under section 7(1) of the Industrial Development Act 1982 is delegated to the Secretary of State. The terms of the delegated powers are subject to regular review; the cost per job limit has remained unchanged since 1984.

Instruments of Torture

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will investigate the supply of equipment by British companies for use for execution or torture.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave on 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *292-94*.

Steel Production

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantity of steel and engineering steel was produced in the United Kingdom in the last quarter of 1991 and in the same period in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Leigh: Information on crude steel production is regularly published in "Economic Trends" which is available in the Library of the House. "Engineering steel" cannot be separately identified in production statistics.

Furniture Industry

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to be in a position to respond to the concerns of the British Self-Catering Federation with regard to EC proposals on material content in furniture and associated issues; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* The Commission decided, in May 1991, to suspend work on the draft EC directive on the fire behaviour of upholstered furniture pending further research into the fire characteristics of materials used in furniture and into test methods. The objective of this research is to support requirements imposing limits on the burning behaviour of upholstered furniture and the associated emission of smoke and toxic gases. We have made it clear to the Commission that we will retain our furniture regulations until a regime consistent with the level of protection in the United Kingdom is available under the directive.

The application of the United Kingdom's Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations to self-catering holiday accommodation has necessitated a wide ranging review of the legal position with the involvement of other Departments. I am consulting with colleagues about a possible way forward and I hope to be able to make some positive proposals shortly.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at what time he received the letter from the Official Receiver on 14 January; and at what time his letter was dispatched appointing the liquidators of the BCCI.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* On the making of the winding up order against BCCI on 14 January 1992 the Official Receiver applied by fax to the Secretary of State for the appointment of joint liquidators in his place. This fax was received by officials at 12.57 on 14 January who confirmed the appointment by the Secretary of State by fax at 13.09 on the same day.

HEALTH

Factor 8

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of factor 8 produced by the Bio Products Laboratory is of high purity 8 SM.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is commercially confidential.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the number of units of factor 8 which the national blood transfusion service or the national health service has purchased from overseas suppliers in each of the last two years.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

Blood and Plasma

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the implications of the single European market on progress towards national self-sufficiency in blood and plasma products; and if he will make a statement;

(2) by what date he envisages that the United Kingdom and Europe will have self-sufficiency in blood and plasma products.

Mr. Dorrell: The EC directive which harmonises the licensing requirements for blood products promotes a policy of Community self-sufficiency in such products derived from the donations of voluntary and unpaid donors but does not forbid importation. This is consistent with our own long-standing policy of seeking self-sufficiency in blood products sourced from our own volunteer donors. Nevertheless, while promoting self-sufficiency we also recognise the clinical freedom of doctors to choose the product most suitable for an individual patient.

Imported products are being prescribed in this country as the result of the preference of individual clinicians. The Bio-Products Laboratory is meeting in full the current demand for its blood products and continues to make efforts to increase its share of the blood products market but the choice of product remains with the clinician.

No target date has yet been set for the achievement of self-sufficiency in blood products throughout the EC.

National Blood Authority

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding his recent circular on the establishment of a national blood authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a wide range of responses to the consultation document on the proposal to establish a national blood authority—NBA—to oversee the provision of blood supplies in England. Respondents have generally supported the principle of a NBA to replace the national directorate of the National Blood Transfusion Service and the Central Blood Laboratories Authority. We now propose to set up a technical working group of the main National Health Service interests to consider the relevant operational matters.

Our blood supply is among the safest in the world thanks to our blood services and the voluntary donors who freely give their blood for the benefit of those who need it. We consider the NBA will be effective in maintaining and improving on the high standards of safety, quality and efficiency in our blood services to the benefit of both patients and donors.

Waiting Lists (Haringey)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the latest waiting list for each specialty in the Haringey health authority and the number of people who have waited *(a)* for over one year and *(b)* for over two years, in each specialty.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest information available centrally is given in the table.

Waiting list data—at 31 March 1991
Haringey health authority—ordinary admissions and day cases

Specialty	*Gross waiting list*	*Number waiting over one year*	*Number waiting over two years*
General surgery	965	266	66
Urology	436	74	20
Trauma and Orthopaedics	684	249	85

Specialty	Gross waiting list	Number waiting over one year	Number waiting over two years
Ear, nose and throat	0	0	0
Ophthalmology	253	25	1
Oral surgery	76	1	0
Plastic surgery	0	0	0
Gynaecology	259	1	0
General medicine	132	0	0
Other	14	0	0
TOTAL	2,819	616	172

Capital Charging System

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total cost of administering the first year of the capital charging system for his Department.

Mr. Dorrell: About £53,000.

Arachnoiditis

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of medical negligence *(a)* have been settled and *(b)* are still outstanding by sufferers of arachnoiditis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Staff and Beds

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many beds and nursing and auxiliary nursing staff there were in the Ryhope general hospital in the years from 1985 to 1991;

(2) if he will list the number of acute beds in *(a)* Sunderland general hospital, Sunderland royal infirmary, *(b)* Hartlepool general hospital and *(c)* Dryburn general hospital, Durham, during the years 1985 to 1991; and if he will indicate the number of nursing staff and auxiliary staff in the above named hospitals during the same years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Myelograms

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has offered to health authorities on the continued use of myelograms.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None. Prescribing information is available to doctors in the data sheets of the individual products used in myelograms. It is for doctors who use a product to ensure that they are fully familiar with the benefits and the risks of any procedure or treatment.

Research Institutes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by standard region *(a)* the research institutes operated for, or on behalf of, his Department and the total employment thereat, *(b)* the total number of such institutes and the total employment therein and *(c)* if he will express the regional totals as a percentage of the national totals.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department provides funding in support of research through its centrally commissioned research—CCR—programme, the national health service and a number of non-departmental public bodies.

Information in the form requested is available only for the research units funded under the CCR. This is set out in the table. Further information on the CCR is contained in the "DH Yearbook of Research and Development 1990" a copy of which is available in the Library.

As a result of our new R and D strategy announced last April, we expect an increase in employment opportunities for health researchers in coming years.

Region	Unit/Programme	No. of Staff
1. Northern Region	1. Incapacitating Disease and Social Support Research Programme.	7
	2. Centre of Health Services Research.	1
	3. Ambulatory Care Programme.	7
	4. Organisation and Delivery of Direct Patient Care Services.	6
		Regional Total = 21
2. Yorkshire Region	1. Social Policy Research Unit	16
	2. Centre for Health Economics	6
		Regional Total = 22
3. Trent Region	1. Blind Mobility Research Unit	8
	2. Medical Care Research Unit	26
		Regional Total = 34
4. East Anglian Region		
5. North West Thames Region	1. Health Economics Research Group	6
	2. Clinical Accountability Service Planning and Evaluation—CASPE	16
		Regional Total = 22
6. North East Thames Region	1. National Institute for Social Work	14
	2. Thomas Coram Research Unit	22
	3. Clinical Operational Research Unit	6
	4. Institute for Social Studies in Medical Care	7
		Regional Total = 49

Region	Unit/Programme	No. of Staff
7. South East Thames Region	1. Personal Social Services Research Unit	26
	2. Nursing Research Unit	15
	3. Social Medicine and Health Services Research	35
	4. National Study of Health and Growth	5
	4. Unit for Metabolic Medicine	6
		Regional Total = 87
8. South West Thames Region	1. Cancer Screening Evaluation Unit	10
	2. Nursing Practice Research Unit	9
		Regional Total = 19
9. Wessex Region		
10. Oxford Region	1. Unit of Clinical Epidemiology	19
	2. National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit	14
	3. Childhood Cancer Research Group	12
		Regional Total = 45
11. South Western Region	1. Dartington Social Research Unit	13
		Regional Total = 13
12. West Midlands Region	1. Wolfson Research Laboratories	33
	2. General Practice Research Unit	10
		Regional Total = 43
13. Mersey Region		
14. North Western Region	1. Hester Adrian Research Centre	10
	2. Centre for Primary Care Research	6
		Regional Total = 16
15. Wales	1. Centre for Social Policy Research & Development (North Wales)	11
	2. Mental Handicap in Wales—Applied Research Unit (Cardiff)	9
		Regional Total = 20
RD1 RD2 27.1.1992		Grand Total = 391

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to ensure that private nursing homes, as a condition of being licensed, provide physiotherapy, and chiropody services; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Regulations made under the Registered Homes Act 1984 already require that, among other things, the person registered shall, having regard to the age and condition of patients, provide adequate professional and other staff and adequate treatment facilities. It is our view that this would extend, in an appropriate case, to physiotherapy and chiropody services.

"Putting Women in the Picture"

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he received a copy of "Putting Women in the Picture", produced by the British Medical Association.

Mr. Dorrell: We received a copy of the version of this report published in the *British Medical Journal*—BMJ volume 304, 11 January 1992—on 10 January 1992.

Home Care Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what, in the last 12 months, was the number of *(a)* social services clients receiving home care services, *(b)* how many of these paid a charge, *(c)* how many of those who are chargeable had the charge waived on hardship grounds and *(d)* how many of those charged were in receipt of attendance allowance.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. Some information about numbers of clients is contained in the annual Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy publication "Personal Social Service Statistics Actuals", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Low Income Scheme

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will extend the national health service low income scheme to include the cost of glasses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Help with the cost of spectacles is already available under the NHS low income scheme to people with limited resources.

Specialist Hospital Units

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of patients will be taken on by specialist hospital units on an extra-contractual arrangement after April 1992; whether this will be both in the short-term and the long-term; and what arrangements will be made to accommodate any consequential financial shortfall arising from the transition to the new system of contracts;

(2) which specialist hospital units have completed the drawing up of contracts with regions and districts; and for each unit what is the number of contracts made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. Regional and district health authorities are currently agreeing and finalising their 1992-93 contracts with providers.

Spinal Injury Units

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department issued guidance on contracting after 1992 to the spinal injuries units; and what was the advice given.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In his annual statement about supra-regional services my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in February 1991 the transfer of responsibility for funding spinal injury services to regions. This will become effective on 1 April 1992 and allows regional health authorities time to plan for smooth incorporation of units into the normal contracting arrangements.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding spinal injuries units will receive directly from central Government after April 1992; how the former supra-regional funding will be distributed; and on what basis each unit will receive its allocation.

Mr. Dorrell: From 1 April 1992 funding currently provided to the spinal injury units via the supra-regional services has been included in the main revenue allocations of regional health authorities. Former supra-regional funding has been distributed to regions on the basis of historical patient flows to each unit. Units will receive funding via contracts agreed with purchasers.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of deaths from mesothelioma in England and in Wales during each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of deaths in England, and Wales, with any mention of mesothelioma on the death certificate in 1986-90 is as follows:

	England	*Wales*
1986	642	30
1987	649	28
1988	868	18
1989	783	20
1990	814	27

Population Statistics

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the latest estimates by the Registrar General of *(a)* total populations and *(b)* populations aged 18 years old and over for each district council area in England and Wales.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table.

Estimated mid-year 1990 resident population of England and Wales

	Persons All ages Thousands	*Persons 18+ Thousands*
Greater London	6,794·4	5,268·3
City of London	3·9	3·3
Barking and Dagenham	147·6	113·2
Barnet	310·0	239·7
Bexley	220·2	171·5
Brent	255·6	196·1
Bromley	300·1	237·6
Camden	185·5	147·9
Croydon	319·4	246·5
Ealing	293·3	227·2
Enfield	264·3	205·2
Greenwich	215·9	163·5
Hackney	191·8	142·6
Hammersmith and Fulham	149·3	118·5
Haringey	192·8	147·9
Harrow	192·5	147·9
Havering	231·9	182·0
Hillingdon	235·7	182·1
Hounslow	197·4	150·0
Islington	173·6	135·6
Kensington and Chelsea	130·9	105·0
Kingston upon Thames	139·0	110·5
Lambeth	232·5	179·0
Lewisham	226·3	173·4
Merton	164·9	128·5
Newham	208·6	153·6
Redbridge	234·8	184·3
Richmond upon Thames	167·2	134·1
Southwark	225·5	172·7
Sutton	168·0	131·9
Tower Hamlets	166·9	124·6
Waltham Forest	213·4	164·0
Wandsworth	256·2	203·8
City of Westminster	179·2	144·7
Greater Manchester	2,590·5	1,981·1
Bolton	266·9	202·5
Bury	177·6	136·6
Manchester	446·7	337·3
Oldham	221·7	168·0
Rochdale	208·5	156·1
Salford	234·1	179·9
Stockport	290·5	225·8
Tameside	219·3	169·0
Trafford	214·8	167·2
Wigan	310·4	238·5
Merseyside	1,443·7	1,106·6
Knowsley	157·4	116·3
Liverpool	462·9	352·1
St. Helens	188·5	146·2
Sefton	299·6	233·4
Wirral	335·3	258·5
South Yorkshire	1,296·2	1,007·5
Barnsley	221·8	171·6
Doncaster	294·0	224·7
Rotherham	254·5	194·8
Sheffield	525·8	416·5
Tyne and Wear	1,126·6	874·0
Gateshead	205·0	161·2
Newcastle upon Tyne	277·8	215·9
North Tyneside	191·7	150·3
South Tyneside	156·0	121·6
Sunderland	296·1	225·1
West Midlands	2,614·6	1,994·3

	Persons All ages Thousands	Persons 18+ Thousands
Birmingham	992·8	746·4
Coventry	303·7	230·5
Dudley	306·5	240·3
Sandwell	295·0	226·5
Solihull	203·3	157·6
Walsall	263·9	202·5
Wolverhampton	249·4	190·5
West Yorkshire	2,070·1	1,581·0
Bradford	468·8	347·1
Calderdale	197·8	152·3
Kirklees	375·5	286·3
Leeds	712·2	550·8
Wakefield	315·8	244·4
Avon	952·0	743·3
Bath	83·2	65·9
Bristol	374·3	290·7
Kingswood	88·9	69·9
Northavon	135·7	104·6
Wansdyke	82·6	63·1
Woodspring	187·3	147·1
Bedfordshire	535·5	405·7
North Bedfordshire	139·0	106·1
Luton	171·4	126·9
Mid Bedfordshire	114·8	88·1
South Bedfordshire	110·2	84·6
Berkshire	755·5	574·0
Bracknell Forest	108·2	80·8
Newbury	141·5	106·6
Reading	129·9	100·1
Slough	100·3	75·3
Windsor and Maidenhead	125·5	97·3
Wokingham	150·1	113·8
Buckinghamshire	641·5	485·7
Aylesbury Vale	148·4	112·1
South Buckinghamshire	61·1	48·2
Chiltern	87·3	69·0
Milton Keynes	185·0	134·9
Wycombe	159·6	121·5
Cambridgeshire	664·5	505·2
Cambridge	100·2	78·8
East Cambridgeshire	61·0	47·5
Fenland	74·2	58·2
Huntingdonshire	154·0	114·0
Peterborough	154·3	114·4
South Cambridgeshire	120·7	92·3
Cheshire	959·0	739·1
Chester	113·1	89·0
Congleton	86·7	68·1
Crewe and Nantwich	102·8	79·5
Ellesmere Port and Neston	78·7	60·4
Halton	123·5	90·9
Macclesfield	150·8	119·2
Vale Royal	114·1	87·5
Warrington	189·2	144·5
Cleveland	552·1	417·8
Hartlepool	89·9	68·4
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	144·0	110·0
Middlesbrough	141·6	105·0
Stockton-on-Tees	176·6	134·5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	467·5	368·3
Caradon	75·1	58·4
Carrick	79·5	63·5
Kerrier	87·7	68·4
North Cornwall	73·1	58·1
Penwith	63·1	50·2
Restormel	87·0	68·1
Isles of Scilly	2·0	1·6
Cumbria	492·1	387·2
Allerdale	97·1	76·5
Barrow-in-Furness	69·9	54·5
Carlisle	104·1	81·2
Copeland	71·9	55·5
Eden	47·7	37·8
South Lakeland	101·4	81·8
Derbyshire	933·0	725·9
Amber Valley	114·2	90·0
Bolsover	71·8	55·6
Chesterfield	101·0	80·2
Derby	217·3	166·0
Erewash	107·6	83·4
High Peak	85·1	65·2
North East Derbyshire	97·2	76·2
South Derbyshire	72·8	56·6
The Derbyshire Dales	66·0	52·7
Devon	1,030·5	813·0
East Devon	118·8	96·8
Exeter	103·6	80·7
North Devon	86·1	66·8
Plymouth	252·8	195·0
South Hams	78·1	61·9
Teignbridge	112·0	90·0
Mid Devon	64·1	49·5
Torbay	119·0	96·0
Torridge	52·1	41·3
West Devon	43·8	35·1
Dorset	658·3	528·1
Bournemouth	154·0	125·2
Christchurch	39·3	33·7
North Dorset	55·3	43·3
Poole	132·4	104·9
Purbeck	47·6	37·8
West Dorset	86·2	69·4
Weymouth and Portland	64·6	50·8
East Dorset	78·8	62·9
Durham	599·4	466·3
Chester-le-Street	53·1	41·5
Darlington	100·0	78·0
Derwentside	85·9	67·5
Durham	87·1	68·0
Easington	95·1	72·8
Sedgefield	88·7	68·7
Teesdale	25·0	19·7
Wear Valley	64·6	50·2
East Sussex	712·2	572·2
Brighton	141·2	113·5
Eastbourne	83·4	67·9
Hastings	82·2	64·1
Hove	92·6	75·5
Lewes	90·8	72·2
Rother	85·1	70·1
Wealden	136·8	109·0
Essex	1,533·5	1,192·0

	Persons All ages Thousands	Persons 18+ Thousands
Basildon	156·0	118·5
Braintree	115·6	89·3
Brentwood	68·3	54·8
Castle Point	84·2	65·4
Chelmsford	151·7	116·2
Colchester	154·4	119·1
Epping Forest	111·7	87·6
Harlow	70·3	53·4
Maldon	53·3	41·3
Rochford	73·6	57·4
Southend-on-Sea	167·3	132·3
Tendring	134·1	109·1
Thurrock	126·8	96·5
Uttlesford	66·3	51·0
Gloucestershire	531·4	414·1
Cheltenham	85·8	66·3
Cotswold	75·4	59·6
Forest of Dean	79·0	61·6
Gloucester	92·0	70·0
Stroud	110·1	86·2
Tewkesbury	89·0	70·4
Hampshire	1,547·1	1,192·1
Basingstoke and Deane	142·2	107·7
East Hampshire	102·7	78·8
Eastleigh	103·9	79·5
Fareham	102·4	79·3
Gosport	74·7	56·3
Hart	80·1	61·0
Havant	114·6	86·7
New Forest	163·4	129·0
Portsmouth	184·1	144·2
Rushmoor	82·1	63·0
Southampton	197·4	151·7
Test Valley	103·4	80·6
Winchester	96·1	74·3
Hereford and Worcester	676·2	522·4
Bromsgrove	88·6	68·9
Hereford	49·0	38·0
Leominster	39·7	31·5
Malvern Hills	87·5	68·4
Redditch	78·8	57·5
South Herefordshire	52·5	41·2
Worcester	82·7	63·6
Wychavon	101·8	79·5
Wyre Forest	95·6	74·0
Hertfordshire	988·7	763·8
Broxbourne	82·6	63·8
Dacorum	132·0	100·8
East Hertfordshire	120·7	93·3
Hertsmere	87·8	68·3
North Hertfordshire	113·3	87·3
St. Albans	129·6	101·0
Stevenage	74·4	56·6
Three Rivers	80·5	62·7
Watford	75·8	58·2
Welwyn Hatfield	91·9	71·8
Humberside	859·2	659·9
Beverley	116·5	91·7
Boothferry	66·4	51·4
Cleethorpes	68·2	53·0
Glanford	73·1	56·8
Great Grimsby	89·0	66·7
Holderness	51·8	40·4
Kingston upon Hull	245·3	184·2
East Yorkshire	89·1	70·9
Scunthorpe	59·8	44·8
Isle of Wight	129·7	103·9
Medina	72·7	57·7
South Wight	57·1	46·2
Kent	1,525·5	1,182·2
Ashford	96·5	74·5
Canterbury	131·7	102·8
Dartford	78·4	60·6
Dover	106·7	83·7
Gillingham	95·1	71·2
Gravesham	88·1	68·2
Maidstone	137·0	107·1
Rochester upon Medway	149·3	113·0
Sevenoaks	104·9	80·6
Shepway	88·5	70·3
Swale	117·2	90·4
Thanet	131·8	104·0
Tonbridge and Malling	101·2	79·1
Tunbridge Wells	99·0	76·6
Lancashire	1,395·3	1,075·5
Blackburn	135·4	99·6
Blackpool	139·1	111·7
Burnley	94·4	71·0
Chorley	97·3	74·6
Fylde	74·3	59·5
Hyndburn	79·4	60·1
Lancaster	132·5	103·8
Pendle	85·6	64·7
Preston	128·5	97·0
Ribble Valley	51·8	41·3
Rossendale	65·6	49·5
South Ribble	102·8	78·7
West Lancashire	104·3	80·1
Wyre	104·0	83·9
Leicestershire	897·7	685·7
Blaby	85·6	66·2
Charnwood	151·0	116·7
Harborough	69·3	54·5
Hinckley and Bosworth	98·9	76·7
Leicester	278·0	205·1
Melton	45·1	35·3
North West Leicestershire	81·0	63·1
Oadby and Wigston	51·9	40·6
Rutland	36·9	27·6
Lincolnshire	591·3	464·4
Boston	52·4	41·5
East Lindsey	119·8	95·5
Lincoln	80·9	62·6
North Kesteven	86·5	68·6
South Holland	67·7	54·4
South Kesteven	107·1	82·9
West Lindsey	76·9	59·0
Norfolk	750·7	593·0
Breckland	104·4	82·2
Broadland	106·8	84·8
Great Yarmouth	89·9	69·7
North Norfolk	96·2	78·0
Norwich	117·2	91·5
South Norfolk	101·6	80·5
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	134·5	106·3
Northamptonshire	580·1	441·8
Corby	51·5	38·2

	Persons All ages Thousands	Persons 18+ Thousands
Daventry	64·8	49·1
East Northamptonshire	68·1	52·6
Kettering	76·0	58·9
Northampton	185·1	139·7
South Northamptonshire	67·6	52·0
Wellingborough	67·1	51·4
Northumberland	305·2	237·8
Alnwick	31·6	24·5
Berwick-upon-Tweed	26·3	20·8
Blyth Valley	79·6	60·6
Castle Morpeth	50·4	40·0
Tynedale	57·7	45·2
Wansbrook	59·6	46·6
North Yorkshire	726·4	571·9
Craven	51·1	40·6
Hambleton	78·8	62·5
Harrogate	147·6	117·0
Richmondshire	53·4	41·6
Ryedale	92·2	73·2
Scarborough	106·8	84·8
Selby	95·1	73·1
York	101·2	79·1
Nottinghamshire	1,016·6	788·1
Ashfield	109·8	85·3
Bassetlaw	105·0	82·2
Broxtowe	110·5	87·3
Gedling	110·5	86·8
Mansfield	100·5	77·4
Newark and Sherwood	103·5	80·1
Nottingham	274·9	208·5
Rushcliffe	102·0	80·3
Oxfordshire	586·6	446·5
Cherwell	128·9	94·6
Oxford	118·0	90·7
South Oxfordshire	129·8	100·4
Vale of White Horse	113·0	86·4
West Oxfordshire	96·9	74·4
Shropshire	405·1	311·4
Bridgnorth	50·8	39·9
North Shropshire	56·8	43·7
Oswestry	33·7	26·4
Shrewsbury and Atcham	90·6	70·2
South Shropshire	35·8	28·5
The Wrekin	137·4	102·6
Somerset	464·9	362·2
Mendip	94·7	73·1
Sedgemoor	98·3	76·6
Taunton Deane	96·1	74·8
West Somerset	32·6	26·2
South Somerset	143·3	111·5
Staffordshire	1,040·8	806·2
Cannock Chase	89·7	68·5
East Staffordshire	97·0	75·5
Lichfield	93·8	73·0
Newcastle-under-Lyme	118·7	92·5
South Staffordshire	109·5	84·4
Stafford	119·1	93·8
Staffordshire Moorlands	96·9	75·9
Stoke-on-Trent	246·7	191·1
Tamworth	69·4	51·6
Suffolk	643·8	493·4
Babergh	77·7	60·3
Forest Heath	61·7	44·1
Ipswich	113·7	87·2
Mid Suffolk	78·3	60·6
St. Edmundsbury	92·1	70·8
Suffolk Coastal	113·1	85·6
Waveney	107·3	84·8
Surrey	1,002·9	782·3
Elmbridge	107·1	84·8
Epsom and Ewell	68·4	53·7
Guildford	123·6	95·1
Mole Valley	76·1	60·2
Reigate and Banstead	115·4	90·6
Runnymede	72·0	57·1
Spelthorne	84·9	67·8
Surrey Heath	84·2	64·0
Tandridge	75·3	58·5
Waverley	109·8	84·6
Woking	86·0	66·0
Warwickshire	482·6	376·4
North Warwickshire	60·1	47·1
Nuneaton and Bedworth	116·1	89·5
Rugby	85·9	66·2
Stratford-on-Avon	105·7	83·4
Warwick	114·9	90·2
West Sussex	704·9	560·6
Adur	57·0	45·8
Arun	129·5	106·2
Chichester	106·3	86·0
Crawley	84·7	65·1
Horsham	109·3	84·3
Mid Sussex	119·6	92·4
Worthing	98·6	80·8
Wiltshire	561·9	430·2
Kennet	68·6	51·3
North Wiltshire	114·3	88·3
Salisbury	101·6	78·4
Thamesdown	171·1	129·8
West Wiltshire	106·4	82·4
Clwyd	411·8	318·4
Alyn and Deeside	73·2	55·7
Colwyn	56·2	44·5
Delyn	66·8	51·4
Glyndwr	42·2	33·0
Rhuddlan	56·5	44·7
Wrexham Maelor	117·0	89·2
Dyfed	354·0	276·0
Carmarthen	57·3	45·0
Ceredigion	68·6	53·6
Dinefwr	39·0	30·6
Llanelli	75·6	59·4
Preseli Pembrokeshire	70·2	54·0
South Pembrokeshire	43·4	33·4
Gwent	447·5	343·5
Blaenau Gwent	77·4	59·7
Islwyn	68·6	52·9
Monmouth	81·0	63·2
Newport	127·0	96·4
Torfaen	93·7	71·5
Gwynedd	241·1	187·4

	Persons All ages Thousands	Persons 18+ Thousands
Aberconwy	54·4	43·4
Arfon	56·2	42·8
Dwyfor	27·1	21·6
Meirionnydd	32·3	25·6
Ynys Mon	71·1	54·0
Mid Glamorgan	539·6	411·6
Cynon Valley	64·6	49·7
Merthyr Tydfil	59·7	45·4
Ogwr	137·1	105·6
Rhondda	76·8	58·8
Rhymney Valley	104·1	78·0
Taff-Ely	97·3	74·0
Powys	117·4	92·1
Brecknock	41·3	32·6
Montgomeryshire	52·6	41·0
Radnorshire	23·5	18·6
South Glamorgan	406·8	309·7
Cardiff	287·2	218·3
Vale of Glamorgan	119·5	91·4
West Glamorgan	363·2	281·5
Port Talbot	48·4	37·7
Lliw Valley	63·3	49·2
Neath	64·9	50·2
Swansea	186·6	144·4

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were removed from waiting lists *(a)* by admission for treatment and *(b)* for reasons other than treatment, in each regional health authority in each six month period since September 1988.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The latest regional level information available centrally is given in the table.

Waiting list data
Admissions for treatment

All cases waiting	September 1988	March 1989	Six monthly periods to: September 1989	March 1990	September 1990	March 1991
Northern	107,243	110,411	108,035	111,170	106,025	113,109
Yorkshire	103,751	112,876	112,720	115,667	111,105	113,140
Trent	128,393	124,519	123,085	126,011	128,653	130,031
East Anglian	56,530	60,176	62,611	61,181	60,889	65,536
North West Thames	81,947	81,929	85,832	85,983	84,302	71,790
North East Thames	97,634	100,286	114,658	116,007	110,956	112,241
South East Thames	99,188	92,556	98,509	94,116	93,750	91,223
South West Thames	55,845	56,363	59,513	62,098	66,487	65,355
Wessex	70,863	76,476	77,202	78,559	79,981	78,905
Oxford	56,990	60,099	62,115	62,047	62,024	60,692
South Western	99,172	99,834	98,125	98,032	97,711	100,846
West Midlands	130,592	132,097	130,908	139,173	133,737	136,409
Mersey	69,377	72,765	74,879	77,252	74,714	79,530
North Western	118,071	126,160	125,510	135,540	139,474	141,213
SHAs	24,980	24,963	26,350	25,594	26,352	24,825
ENGLAND	1,300,576	1,331,510	1,360,052	1,388,430	1,376,160	1,384,845

Waiting list data
Removed not admitted for treatment

All cases waiting	September 1988	March 1989	Six monthly periods to: September 1989	March 1990	September 1990	March 1991
Northern	2,228	2,573	3,216	3,833	5,300	5,469
Yorkshire	5,513	8,020	8,852	7,784	7,675	9,462
Trent	4,797	5,420	5,759	5,874	7,558	10,081
East Anglian	3,401	4,035	7,465	10,710	7,636	6,722
North West Thames	8,267	10,911	7,582	9,637	9,540	12,099
North East Thames	11,629	17,092	20,097	20,152	17,922	26,274
South East Thames	8,215	9,129	8,408	11,138	12,137	22,396
South West Thames	5,567	6,259	8,889	9,048	9,228	8,506
Wessex	5,936	7,032	8,069	8,461	9,194	10,438
Oxford	4,233	4,320	5,327	6,406	6,281	8,004
South Western	5,598	6,662	6,149	6,913	7,780	10,085
West Midlands	9,404	11,253	10,989	13,472	12,898	14,303
Mersey	7,355	9,117	9,010	10,128	9,327	9,977
North Western	5,851	6,090	7,248	7,925	11,315	11,664
SHAs	2,556	2,214	2,439	2,523	4,190	3,438
ENGLAND	90,550	110,127	119,499	134,004	137,981	168,918

Source: SM12A–KH06.

Electors

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his estimates for 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991 of *(a)* the total number of adults eligible to vote and *(b)* the total number registered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* The information requested, relating to England and Wales, is as follows:

(Thousands)

	Total parliamentary electors	*Approximate corresponding resident population at preceding mid-year*
1988	38,629	39,852
1989	38,561	40,040
1990	38,596	40,203
1991	38,509	40,305

The electorate figures include unknown numbers of legitimate dual registrations—by persons with second homes and students—each year, as well as overseas electors.

The resident population estimates include persons aged 17, and 63 per cent. of those aged 16, who will become 18 during the period when each electoral register is in use. No account has been taken of adults who die between the mid-year reference date and the 10 October qualifying date for the following year's electoral register. The estimates include residents who are not Commonwealth citizens or citizens of the Republic of Ireland, persons detained in mental institutions, and peers, none of whom are eligible to be parliamentary electors.

These population estimates are based on the 1981 census; provisional estimates for 1991 based on the 1991 census will be available in the autumn.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Higher Education

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the outcome of his consultations about a common financial year in the proposed single higher education system.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department and the Welsh Office education department are today writing to higher education institutions in the following terms:

Higher education institutions: A common financial year

The White Paper, "Higher Education: A New Framework" (Cm. 1541), indicated the Government's intention that there should be a common financial year to operate within institutions in the new higher education sector. By "financial year" is meant that period for which accounts are maintained. As a first step, the White Paper indicated that there would be consultation with the UFC and PCFC on what that year should be. There would then be consultation with institutions' representative bodies.

Following consultation as indicated above, the Government have decided that the common financial year should be 1 August—31 July. This was the preferred option of the representative bodies of higher education institutions and the Funding Councils, and reflects the cycle of academic activity in most institutions.

Subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill *[Lords]*, the Secretary of State proposes to direct that the 1993-94 financial year of Higher Education Corporations shall be 1 August—31 July. Subsequent financial years shall be each successive period of twelve months. The 1992-93 financial year will therefore end on 31 July 1993.

Other higher education institutions in receipt of public funding have the power to determine their own financial years, and those which currently do not operate on 1 August—31 July are requested to change on a similar timetable to that proposed for the Corporations.

GCSE Results

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of young people in local education authority schools in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham and Greenwich achieved one or more GCSE in 1989, 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is not available centrally.

Training

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average cost of full-time vocational training provided by colleges of further education in Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark.

Mr. Eggar: The information available to the Department is not disaggregated in the form requested.

Local Authorities (Sport)

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the latest outturn of spending by local authorities on the provision of sport and recreation which were relevant to his Department.

Mr. Atkins: Total net expenditure on sport and active recreation by local authorities in England was £781 million in 1989-90. This is the latest available final outturn figure. Figures for the preceding three years are as follows:

Local authority net expenditure on sport and active recreation in England

£ million

	Current	*Capital*	*Total*
1986-87	362	154	516
1987-88	381	156	537
1988-89	413	194	607

School Leavers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide for Greater London a table showing the numbers of school leavers in each year from 1988 to 1991 who went into *(a)* a job, *(b)* a YT or YTS, *(c)* further education, *(d)* unemployment and *(e)* none of these.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* The table gives a breakdown of the pupils leaving school in Greater London, analysed by their intended destinations for the academic years 1987-88 to 1989-90, the latest year for which information is available. The Department does not hold information on the numbers of school leavers expecting to become unemployed.

School Examinations Survey
Greater London School Leavers

Intended destination	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
		Thousands	
A Job[1]	35·58	24·08	22·13
A YT or YTS[1]	[2]—	1·98	1·70
Further education	25·15	24·13	25·27
Other and unknown	14·95	18·02	17·33
Total Leavers	75·68	68·21	66·43

[1] In 1987-88, the category for those intending to go to employment included pupils joining YTS schemes or with other destinations thought to be employment. From 1988-89 a separate YTS category has been specified in the Survey.
[2] Not known.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Farming

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were employed in farming in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is given in the table. It is based on returns made in the June agricultural census, which does not cover minor holdings.

Year	*Total agricultural labour force*
1987	59,383
1988	59,455
1989	59,096
1990	58,436
1991	57,212

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many full-time farmers there were in Northern Ireland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is given in the table. It is based on returns made in the June agricultural census, which does not cover minor holdings.

Year	*Full-time farmers*
1987	24,583
1988	24,620
1989	23,199
1990	22,722
1991	22,307

Fire Services

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the population of Donaghadee in the censuses of 1981 and 1991; what is the estimated additional population in the Donaghadee/Ballywalter area in the summer due to caravan holiday makers; how many fire engines were based in Donaghadee in 1981 and at the end of 1991; how many fire calls there were to the Donaghadee fire station in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement on the future adequacy of the fire service in Donaghadee.

Mr. Needham: The population of Donaghadee in the 1981 census was 4,018. The 1991 census figure will not be available for some considerable time. However, the electoral ward figure in the 1991 census preliminary report for the town of Donaghadee and surrounding area is 5,662 as compared to 5,599 in 1981. The estimated additional population in the Donaghadee/Ballywalter area in the summer due to caravan holiday makers is approximately 11,800. This figure is based on the number of caravans currently licensed and assumes four persons per caravan.

Two fire engines were based at Donaghadee in 1981 and one at the end of 1991.

Details of the fire calls to Donaghadee fire station are as follows:

	Number
1982	111
1983	186
1984	155
1985	121
1986	157
1987	168
1988	137
1989	133
1990	142
1991	209

The fire authority's recent survey indicates that the town of Donaghadee is a category C fire risk area and the surrounding area is category D. The authority is satisfied that it can meet the Home Office standard response times for these risk categories by the provision of one fire engine at the Donaghadee station and appropriate levels of support from surrounding stations, including the new whole-time station at Bangor, when necessary. The position is kept under regular review.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many fire engines were based in the peninsula electoral areas of Ards borough council at the end of 1990; how many engines are based there at present; at which locations they are based; when a new fire engine will be based at Ballywalter; and if he will make a statement about the adequacy of the fire services in the peninsula area between the present time and the provision of the new fire engine at Ballywalter.

Mr. Needham: Seven fire engines were based in the Peninsula electoral areas of Ards borough council at the end of 1990. Six are based there at present located as follows:

Newtownards — 3
Donaghadee — 1
Portaferry — 2

The fire authority expects that, subject to the satisfactory training of personnel, a new fire engine will be based at Ballywalter in early 1993. At present the Ballywalter area is marginally outside the Home Office standard response time of 20 minutes from the nearest neighbouring fire station at Donaghadee. The provision of a fire engine at Ballywalter will enable the fire authority to rectify this. The fire authority is satisfied with the adequacy of fire services elsewhere in the Peninsula area.

Population Statistics

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the latest estimates by the Registrar General of *(a)* total populations and *(b)* populations aged 18 years old and over for each district council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested, taken from the 1990 mid-year estimates of population, is as follows:

District council area	*Population (to nearest 100)*
Ards	65,400
Belfast	295,100
Castlereagh	58,100
Down	57,700
Lisburn	98,700
North Down	72,600
Antrim	47,600
Ballymena	57,300
Ballymoney	24,100
Carrickfergus	31,000
Coleraine	48,600
Cookstown	27,700
Larne	29,000
Magherafelt	33,200
Moyle	15,000
Newtownabbey	72,900
Armagh	49,100
Banbridge	32,100
Craigavon	78,200
Dungannon	43,800
Newry and Mourne	89,700
Fermanagh	50,600
Limavady	29,900
Derry	100,500
Omagh	45,800
Strabane	35,700

Figures on age breakdown of the population to district council level are not produced in mid-year estimates. However, this information will be included in the Northern Ireland census 1991 summary report, to be published in the autumn.

Prisoner Statistics

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners in Northern Ireland prisons were serving *(a)* mandatory and *(b)* discretionary life sentences on 31 December; and in each case how many of them had served more than 10 years on that date.

Dr. Mawhinney: A total of 311 prisoners were serving mandatory life sentences, of whom 164 had served more than 10 years. Fifteen prisoners were serving discretionary life sentences, of whom 12 had served more than 10 years.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of those prisoners who had served more than 10 years on 31 December are in a segregated wing chosen by *(a)* Republican and *(b)* Loyalist prisoners.

Dr. Mawhinney: Forty seven life sentence prisoners were in segregated republican wings and 27 life sentence prisoners were in segregated loyalist wings.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the length of sentence served by each prisoner in Northern Ireland prisons sentenced to a *(a)* mandatory and *(b)* discretionary life sentence which exceeded 10 years on 31 December.

Dr. Mawhinney: It would be inappropriate to list individual prisoners and the sentences they have served, but the table gives a summary of the numbers who have been detained for more than 10 years.

Type of sentence	*Number of prisoners by years served*									
	10	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*Total*
Mandatory	12	29	18	23	46	22	9	2	3	164
Discretionary	1	2	1	3	4	3	1	0	0	12

National Insurance

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be the effect in in 1991-92 and 1992-93, on both a first year and a full year basis, on the national insurance contributions of *(a)* employees and *(b)* employees and the self-employed, if (i) national insurance contributions were chargeable at the current rates on fringe benefit, (ii) national insurance contributions were chargeable at the current rates on unearned income of those under retirement age in excess of £60 per week, (iii) the ceilings on contributions were abolished, (iv) a combination of (i), (ii) and (iii) and (v) as (iv), but if contracting-out rebates were abolished and the current 9 per cent. contribution rate was cut to 8 per cent.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 24 January 1992]:* I regret that it is not possible to provide all the information requested. However, figures for the revenue yield of national insurance if the ceilings on contributions were abolished are:

£ million

	First year	*Full year*
1991-92		
Employees only	25	30
Employees and self-employed	30	40
1992-93		
Employees only	30	35
Employees and self-employed	35	45

SOCIAL SECURITY

Students (Vacation Payments)

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received concerning the restriction of social security payments to students during their vacations.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received a number of representations on this matter, but responsibility for student maintenance is that of my right hon. and Learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Employment Training (Disability)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what ways participation in employment training or youth training will affect the eligibility for disability living allowance of a person with a disability who will qualify for either the mobility and/or care elements of disability living allowance after April 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Participation in employment training or youth training will not affect entitlement to either component of disability living allowance. There will be no change in the curent arrangements for attendance allowance; after six months on such a scheme, claimants will be asked whether their needs have changed. The award may then be reviewed, depending on the claimant's answer.

Homes (Fees)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence he has of whether elderly people have been obliged to leave residential or nursing homes because they were unable to meet the fees.

Miss Widdecombe: We have received no such evidence.

Housing Costs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what rules govern entitlement to mortgage interest payments to those on income support who have contractual mortgages where the interest rate is fixed annually and where that rate is greater than the prevailing monthly interest rate for other mortgages;

(2) what guidance is issued to local office staff when determining the level of mortgage interest payments to those on income support where the interest charged on their mortgage is greater than the average mortgage rate of interest;

(3) what figure is used to calculate the level of mortgage interest rates when income support claimants are eligible for assistance with mortgage interest payments;

(4) how many people receiving mortgage interest payments from income support are liable to make monthly payments subject to review by the lender at fixed annual intervals.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support mortgage interest payments are calculated using the interest rate chargeable on the loan in question, even if that rate is greater than the generally prevailing one. There are no special rules for fixed interest rate mortgages. Guidance for local office staff on the calculation of income support mortgage interest, including details of some of the various schemes on the market, is included in the adjudication officers guide, a copy of which is available in the Library.

No statistics are collected on the numbers of income support recipients with mortgages subject to annual review by the lender.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer of 24 January, what response he has made to the representations made by Bradford and district Age Concern between July and November 1991 about cold weather payments in Bradford.

Mr. Scott: Replies have been sent to Bradford and district Age Concern.

DEFENCE

Battalions

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *514*, on how many occasions battalions, other than those on a spearhead tour of duty, have been deployed over the past five years to meet various short-notice requirements, excluding Operation Granby.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Between January 1987 and December 1991 there have been six occasions when additional units have been deployed to meet short-notice requirements, each time to Northern Ireland, for short periods. Two units—the 1st Battalion, the Royal Highland Fusiliers and the 27th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery—are also currently temporarily deployed to the Province.

Military Training Grounds

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to designate any further areas of mid-Wales as military training grounds for members of the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans at present to acquire any major new area of land in Wales for military training. The reshaping of our armed forces is, however, likely to result in increased pressure on existing training areas throughout the United Kingdom. The Ministry of Defence may therefore need from time to time to acquire or dispose of land on the edges of some of these areas in order to enhance their integrity and training value.

Tracked Vehicles

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department intends that tracked vehicles should make increased use of training areas in Scotland as a result of proposed changes in deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no such plans.

Military Satellites

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what contribution his Department is making to the costs of studies of options for future military satellites currently being undertaken by the Western European Union;

(2) what contribution his Department is making to the costs of operation of the Western European Union satellite station at Torrejon air force base in Spain.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A satellite data interpretation and training centre is to be established in Spain with a United Kingdom director, for an experimental period of three years. The United Kingdom contribution of £4·6 million will be met by my Department. The United Kingdom contribution of £0·6 million to WEU satellite systems feasibility studies will be met by the Department of Trade and Industry.

REME Workshops, Liverpool

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for 42 district workshops REME, Liverpool.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A study into the Army's requirements for static workshops is now in progress. No decisions have yet been taken.

Firefighters

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the salary scales of each grade of firefighter in the armed forces; and what mechanisms exist to study comparability with firefighters employed by fire and civil defence authorities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service men trained in firefighting skills are paid at the same rate as other service personnel of equal rank and pay banding. No mechanism exists to study comparability with firefighters employed by fire and civil defence authorities.

Industrial Base

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the future size and shape of the British defence industrial base.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am confident that the commercial approach to procurement which my Department pursues will continue to ensure that the British defence industry remains strong, efficient and innovative.

Defence Budgets

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish what information he has regarding the defence budgets of all members of NATO; and if he will show for each their defence budget *(a)* as a percentage of gross domestic product and *(b)* in £ sterling.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to table 10 of volume 1 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991". The average exchange rate used was $1·79 to £1.

Defence Establishment Closures

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what arrangements he made *(a)* to inform the work force and *(b)* to make a public announcement of the closure decision in respect of the Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn;

(2) what arrangements he made *(a)* to inform the work force and *(b)* to make a public announcement of his decision to close RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on 24 January, *Official Report*, columns *377-78*. The work forces at both establishments were informed in the usual way.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the arrangements to involve the Welsh Office in the decision-making process on the future of (i) Royal Navy armaments depot, Trecwn and (ii) RAF Brawdy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There has been regular contact between the MOD and the Welsh Office, at ministerial and official level, throughout the decision-making process. The MOD will be represented on the special west Wales task force which was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on 24 January.

Military Bases

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on informing the work force at military bases of closure decisions prior to that information being made public.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In accordance with departmental practice, announcements on closure decisions are made to the work force concerned at the time the decision becomes public knowledge.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Theft

Mr. Andrew Hargreaves: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many thefts were reported in the Palace of Westminster in 1989 and 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: Thirty-seven and 66 respectively. Each report of property stolen is vigorously followed up by the police. The amount of property stolen would be considerably reduced if articles of value were secured and desks and filing cabinets locked when offices are left unattended.

EMPLOYMENT

Training

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is his estimate of *(a)* how many adults will be eligible for training under the employment training initiative in Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark in 1992-93 and *(b)* the percentage of these adults who are likely to be classified as facing special training needs;

(2) what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of young people likely to fall into the youth training guarantee group in 1992-93, in the four boroughs of Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark and *(b)* the percentage of these young people in the youth training guarantee group who are likely to have special training needs.

Mr. Jackson: The south Thames training and enterprise council, which covers Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, is responsible for providing training places under employment training and youth training in its area, including training places for those with special training needs. The training and enterprise council is currently discussing the number of training places required in 1992-93 with my officials.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the estimated average cost for providing additional support for trainees on youth training and employment training for *(a)* child care support, *(b)* language support, *(c)* travel, *(d)* communication services for the deaf and premises adaptation and *(e)* other specialist support for people with disabilities.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the average cost of providing training for adults and young people on employment training and youth training programmes in Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark.

Mr. Jackson: The south Thames training and enterprise council, which covers Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark, is currently negotiating its plans for 1992-93 with my officials. While these negotiations are in progress they are subject to normal confidentiality.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the percentage of young people and adults eligible for employment training and youth training, who may require child care support payments in Lambeth, Lewisham, Greenwich and Southwark.

Mr. Jackson: It is not possible to estimate the number of young people and adults who may require help with the cost of child care in order to enter YT and ET. Training and enterprise councils are required to provide reasonable and necessary support costs, including child care, for those ET and YT trainees who are resident or normally resident in the TEC area, and who are in the guarantee and aim groups.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people were registered as unemployed and covered by the guarantee by the careers offices in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham and Greenwich on 10 January.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not available in the form requested.

Tourism

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what progress has been achieved in finding a method of accumulating statistics of day visitors to coastal resort towns so an appropriate criteria can be added to the standard spending assessment calculations, to compensate local authorities for the extra expenditure required to support tourism.

Mr. Forth: Information on day visits from the home is available for most counties from the leisure day visits survey. Officials from my Department are assisting their colleagues in the Department of the Environment who are considering how this and subsequent survey data can best be developed for use in the standard spending assessment calculations.

Work Permits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what has been the number of work permits issued by his Department in each of the last three years; and what was the employment for which these permits were given.

Mr. Forth: The total number of work permits granted in 1989, 1990 and 1991 were 29,730, 34,627 and 28,978 respectively. The main areas of employment in each year for which permits were granted were:

Occupational groups	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Professional entertainers	12,107	13,289	12,248
Company secretaries, accountancy occupations	4,877	5,442	3,921
Directors, general managers	2,050	2,318	1,697
Engineering researchers, designers, consultants	1,695	1,877	1,144
Management specialists	1,279	1,024	666
Scientific researchers and consultants	1,155	974	1,092
Hotel and catering occupations	1,104	1,186	1,060
Health care occupations	973	1,317	1,398
Teaching and training occupations	840	2,764	1,373
Construction specialists	840[1]	1,675	1,982
Marketing and public relations specialists etc.	629	532	327

[1] Revised figure.

Of the total figures for each year 4,228, 4,812 and 3,513 were granted in 1989, 1990 and 1991 under the training and work experience scheme.

Disabled People

Mr. Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to publicise the advantages to employers of employing disabled people in respect of their aptitude for certain kind of work, including routine work.

Mr. Jackson: We believe that people with disabilities have the same range of abilities as others in the labour market, and that they should have access to the full range of employment opportunities. The Department already encourages employers to recognise the advantages of employing people with disabilities and to adopt and implement constructive policies and practices in this area. The Employment Service's disablement advisory service works with employers to achieve this.

In 1984, the Department published the code of good practice on the employment of disabled people; in 1990, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State launched the disability symbol initiative, which offers employers the opportunity to state publicly their commitment to recruiting, integrating in employment, retaining and offering career development to people with disabilities. The Department has also recently reconstituted the committees for the employment of people with disabilities and has given them a more focused brief to promote effective policies to employers.

Unemployment (Costs)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will estimate the total current cost of unemployment to the Exchequer including benefits, administrative costs and lost revenue.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available estimate of gross benefit payments to the unemployed in 1991-92 is £5,590 million. The cost of administering unemployment benefit in 1989-90, the latest year for which figures are available, was £176 million. Administration costs for other benefits paid to the unemployed cannot be separately identified. Estimates of tax revenue foregone are not available.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what information he has about how many offshore installations have carried out a review of the ability of emergency systems to withstand severe weather conditions, as recommended by the Cullen report; and what the Health and Safety Executive has done to ensure that installations have carried out this review;

(2) what the Health and Safety Executive has done to ensure that all personnel on board offshore installations are supplied with personal survival equipment, in accordance with recommendations Nos. 85 and 86 of Lord Cullen's report;

(3) what information he has about how many offshore operators have undertaken an evacuation, escape and rescue analysis of their installations as recommended by Lord Cullen; and what the Health and Safety Executive has done to ensure this has been done;

(4) what information he has on how many offshore installation operators have conducted fire-risk analysis, as recommended by Lord Cullen in his report on Piper Alpha;

(5) what action the Health and Safety Executive has taken to ensure that fire-risk analysis is carried out on all offshore installations; and what assistance the Health and Safety Executive has given to the platform operators by way of practical and technical advice;

(6) how many offshore installation operators have carried out an assessment of the risk of ingress of smoke or gas into the accommodation sections as recommended by Lord Cullen in his report on Piper Alpha; and what the Health and Safety Executive has done to ensure that these assessments have been carried out;

(7) what information he has about how many offshore installations have fitted smoke and gas detectors and implemented ventilation shutdown arrangements for accommodation sections as recommended in the Cullen report; and what the Health and Safety Executive has done to ensure that this recommendation has been acted upon.

Mr. Forth: Immediately following the publication of Lord Cullen's report, the Department of Energy wrote to individual companies and industry organisations asking for action on these and other recommendations which could be implemented without, or in advance of, legislation. Following the transfer of regulatory responsibility, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) wrote in July 1991 asking for progress reports on these recommendations.

All offshore operators have now responded. The HSE is following up these responses with individual companies where necessary and monitoring progress during offshore inspections. In appropriate cases enforcement powers will be used to require improvements to be made.

I understand that the Health and Safety Commission's proposals for safety case regulations to be published next month will require all these areas to be addressed adequately and in an integrated way.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what research work the Health and Safety Executive is currently engaged in to do with escape methods from offshore installations; and how far this work is being conducted jointly with the offshore industries;

(2) what extra money the Government are making available to fund research into safe escape methods for emergency conditions on board offshore installations.

Mr. Forth: Studies on temporary safe refuges, methods to enhance the launch capacity of survival craft, the practicability and safety of escape chutes and emergency stairway systems, survivor recovery techniques and personal protective equipment have been commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division. The offshore industry is collaborating in all of these studies.

Research on evacuation, escape and rescue methods is one of the HSE's main priority areas within its research strategy for offshore safety. The enhanced financial provision for offshore safety provided by Ministers following the Cullen report included an element to cover these and other recommendations for additional safety research.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what the Health and Safety Executive has done to ensure that all offshore installation managers and their deputies receive training and regular refresher courses in decision making for emergency situations;

(2) what advice the Health and Safety Executive has given to offshore installation operators about emergency drills and exercises, their frequency, content and which staff should be included in the exercises.

Mr. Forth: Existing offshore safety legislation specifies the frequency and content of emergency drills and musters and which persons should be included.

I understand that the Health and Safety Commission's proposals for safety case regulations to be published next month will require these and other aspects of safety-related training to be adequately addressed as part of the operator's safety management system.

In the meantime, the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation, the Health and Safety Executive and both sides of industry are working together to develop a standard for training in offshore emergency command and control, aimed specifically at offshore installation managers.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice the Health and Safety Executive has given to offshore installation operators about the registering of contractor staff; how often these lists are updated; and where copies of the register are kept.

Mr. Forth: The Offshore Installations (Logbooks and Registration of Death) Regulations 1972 require that a continuous record of persons on or working from an offshore installation is maintained both on the installation and onshore. The record must include details of the employers of such persons.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many offshore installations currently have totally enclosed motor propelled survival craft available with a capacity of carrying safely 150 per cent. of the people on the installation.

Mr. Forth: The maximum number of persons allowed on board any offshore installation is fixed by the Health and Safety Executive following an examination of lifesaving appliances. However, since the number of persons on board offshore installations varies according to the activities being undertaken, this information can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the safety case regulations for offshore installations will be applicable to temporary and experimental drill sites.

Mr. Forth: I understand that the Health and Safety Commission's proposals for safety case regulations, to be published next month, apply to all fixed and mobile offshore installations engaged in drilling activities.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps have been taken to create a central register of the personal details of offshore employees who have attended training courses;

(2) what consultations he has had with the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association concerning the implementation of Lord Cullen's recommendation 105 on minimum training requirements.

Mr. Forth: The United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association has issued revised guidelines for offshore emergency safety training; these take account of consultations with the Health and Safety Executive, whose inspectors will take them into account in considering compliance with employers' general duties to provide adequate training. The guidelines state that they represent a minimum training requirement for survival, firefighting and emergency safety training; and that personnel who have not met the minimum requirements should not be permitted to work offshore.

In July 1989 the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation established a central training register to hold details of attendance at, and completion of, emergency safety training courses by offshore personnel. Access to the register is available by registering as a user.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on what the

Health and Safety Executive is doing, before the safety case regulations are brought in, to ensure that offshore installation operators are complying with existing safety regulations.

Mr. Forth: Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division will continue to enforce existing offshore health and safety regulations by conducting inspections and audits and by using their powers to require improvements to be made or to prohibit activities where necessary. Additional inspectors are being recruited using the increased resources made available to the Health and Safety Commission to implement the recommendations in Lord Cullen's report and to enhance the inspection and audit functions.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the recommendations made by Lord Cullen from the Piper Alpha inquiry, that have already been implemented; if he will list the recommendations made by Lord Cullen that will be implemented by the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]*; and if he will list those recommendations which will be implemented by regulation.

Mr. Forth: The following recommendations in Lord Cullen's report have been implemented: numbers 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 34, 53, 88(part), 91, 93, 94 and 105.

Work is well under way towards implementing the following recommendations, including those which industry have been asked to take forward in advance of legislation: 27, 29, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 45, 46, 48, 52, 54, 59, 60, 61, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 76, 77, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 89, 95, 96, 99, 101, 102, 103 and 104.

Recommendation 18 will be implemented by the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]*.

The proposed safety case regulations and associated guidance will implement recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 28, 32, 40, 44, 47, 51, 65, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104 and 106. I understand that the Health and Safety Commission will be publishing a consultative document in February 1992.

The review of offshore safety regulations and guidance will take forward recommendations 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 49, 50, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 85, 88(part), 89, 90 and 103. The review cannot formally commence until the Offshore Safety Bill has been enacted.

Recommendation 30 will be taken forward as soon as a suitable primary legislative vehicle is available.

On recommendation 92, the Department of Transport already receives notification of the location of standby vessels on a weekly basis and this information is available to HSE's offshore safety division. HSE is considering what further action may be necessary.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with offshore operators about the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]* and the recommendations of the Cullen report; what submissions he has received; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I have met representatives of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association to discuss matters connected with offshore safety. In addition, HSE's offshire safety division has had extensive discussions with offshore industry associations and individual companies about a range of matters arising from the Cullen report.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has had from trade unions concerning the Offshore Safety Bill *[Lords]* and the Cullen report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: No representations have been received from trade unions on the Offshore Safety Bill, but HSE's offshore safety division has had extensive discussions with trade unions about a range of matters arising from the Cullen report.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on what proportion of the offshore division's time will be dedicated to visiting installations and checking that safety cases are correct and are being adhered to.

Mr. Forth: The allocation of OSD time to various activities is a matter for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive. However, the assessment of safety cases and the inspection of installations will be key operational priorities for the division as it expands to more than 400 staff in the next few years.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what he intends to do to bring the safety conditions on board offshore support vessels and standby vessels servicing offshore rigs in line with the recommendations made by Lord Cullen for the rigs themselves;

(2) what plans he has to transfer responsibility for safety on board offshore support vessels and standby vessels to the Health and Safety Executive; what submissions he has received on this issue; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what plans he has to propose that offshore support vessels and standby vessels carry out safety case studies similar to those proposed for offshore installations.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State's responsibilities, and those of the Health and Safety Commission and Executive, relating to the safety of crews of standby and offshore support vessels are confined to activities carried out on or in connection with an offshore installation, as defined in article 4 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 (Application Outside Great Britain) Order 1989. Safety requirements, under the Merchant Shipping Acts, applicable to all merchant crews are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. We have received no submissions on this matter and there are no plans to change these arrangements.

The general duties of operators of offshore installations under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act would include ensuring that support vessels do not put the safety of offshore installation personnel at risk. And I understand that the Health and Safety Commission's forthcoming proposals for safety case regulations apply to all offshore installations and heavy lift vessels, and cover risks to all personnel on the installation, or engaged in connected activities as defined by the 1989 order.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to review the codes of practice for manning and operating standby vessels.

Mr. Forth: Responsibility for review of the regulations and Code relating to standby vessels lies with the Health and Safety Commission and Executive. Many specific

improvements recommended by Lord Cullen were incorporated into a revised code on the assessment of standby vessels attending offshore installations, published in July 1991 by HSE and the Department of Transport; all vessels must fully meet its requirements by 31 December 1992.

Possible changes in regulations will be considered by the commission in taking forward the comprehensive review of existing offshore legislation proposed in Cullen recommendation 19.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what discussions he has had with trade unions, offshore operators and the oil petroleum industry training board about supplying appropriate training packages for staff working on offshore installations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Representatives of the department and of the HSE participate in the work of the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation. Trades unions and offshore operators are represented on the OPITO board, and take part, with HSE, in working groups on training standards and competences.

Close co-operation is likely to continue between HSE and OPITO to develop appropriate training standards for offshore personnel. The Health and Safety Commission's proposals for safety case regulations to be published next month will require safety-related training, and competence standards, to be addressed as part of the operators safety management system.

Silica Dust

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will ask for a report from the Health and Safety Executive on its current proposals for changing the limits of silica dust in the atmosphere; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The new exposure limit for silica has now been implemented by regulations amending the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1988. These were laid before Parliament on 1 November 1991 and came into force on 1 January 1992. The proposal for this new limit was contained in a widely publicised and free consultative document published by the Health and Safety Commission in December 1990 inviting comments on the proposal by April 1991. This proposal followed a review of occupational exposure to silica dust by the Health and Safety Commission's advisory committee on toxic substances whose members include representatives from industry and trades unions as well as independent experts in the field of occupational health and hygiene.

The Health and Safety Commission, whose members also include representatives from employers and employees, considered the comments received and recommended that the proposal for a maximum exposure limit for silica be adopted. I am satisfied with these arrangements for setting the new limit and the consultation procedures employed.

SCOTLAND

Exports

16. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the increase in Scottish exports in the period 1978 to 1990.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There is no comprehensive information on total Scottish exports.

The Scottish Council (Development and Industry), however, carries out an annual survey of Scottish manufacturing exports only. The results show that the value of Scottish manufacturing exports increased by 21 per cent. in real terms, between 1978 and 1990 to their highest ever recorded level of £8·6 billion.

Royal Hospital for Sick Children

7. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will pay an official visit to the royal hospital for sick children to discuss funding the new extension.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend authorised Lothian health board to donate £1 million to the appeal from the disposal of surplus assets. The running costs are estimated at more than £300,000 every year for the new wing and these will also be met by the Government.

Labour Statistics

18. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest unemployment figures in Lanarkshire and Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: After falling in each of the previous four months, the number of claimants in Lanarkshire travel-to-work area in December 1991 was 20,095. The work force based unemployment rate was 11·8 per cent.

In Scotland, the number of claimants on the unadjusted series in December 1991 was 228,766. The work force based unemployment rate was 9·2 per cent.

Industrial Development

19. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise to discuss industrial development in Renfrewshire.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend and I have frequent discussions with the chairman of Scottish Enterprise, often along with the chief executive, addressing a range of subjects including industrial development in all parts of Scotland.

Ravenscraig

20. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he has taken in connection with the proposed closure of British Steel Ravenscraig since 13 January.

Mr. Lang: In addition to the very substantial additional resources, already announced, through Scottish Enterprise, for Lanarkshire development agency, formal notification was made to the European Commission on 23 January of the United Kingdom Government's proposals to designate an enterprise zone in North Lanarkshire.

29. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has as to the effect of the closure of Ravenscraig on the unemployment rate in adjacent areas.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My Department's current best estimate of the local impact of the closure, and associated job losses announced by British Steel on 8 January 1992, is that an increase of less than one percentage point, on a work force basis, in the Lanarkshire travel-to-work area unemployment rate could be anticipated in the medium term. This increase is additional to the impact associated with the earlier steel job loss announcements made in 1991.

Housing

21. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of Scottish local authorities to discuss the current housing situation in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I met representatives of the housing committee of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 6 December 1991. Further meetings with the convention to discuss housing matters will be arranged later this year.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

22. **Mrs. Ray Michie :** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to discuss environmentally sensitive areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. Friend has not met the chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to discuss the environmentally sensitive areas scheme as such. He has, however, recently obtained the council's views on candidates for designation as new ESAs and these are currently being considered with officials of the council.

Nurses

23. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of nurses in training in each of the Scottish health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As the answer is lengthy I will, with permission, circulate the information in the *Official Report*. However, between 1980 and 1991 the number of qualified nurses in the NHS in Scotland rose by 30 per cent. to over 36,400.

Qualified nurses: Changes in demand and supply Scotland: 1980 to 1991[1]

	1980	*1991*	*Percentage change*
Qualified nurses (WTE)	28,028	36,442	+30
Nurses in training[2]	12,414	10,005	−19
Basic students[3]	6,998	7,940	+13
Pupils[4]	3,287	236	−93
Basic students and pupils	10,285	8,176	−21
Net leaving rate – RGN[5]	14·0	10·6	−24
Net leaving rate – EN[5]	14·5	9·9	−32

[1] These data are derived from the annual 30 September census of NHS staff. Data for 1991 are provisional.
[2] Includes post registration/enrollment training.
[3] Excludes post registration students. Note that students become registered nurses when qualified.
[4] Note that pupils become enrolled nurses when qualified.
[5] Net rates refer to nurses in post at one annual census who have left by the next (1991 refers to leavers between 30 September 1990 and 30 September 1991; 1980 refers to leavers between 30 September 1980 and 30 September 1981). These rates include only nurses who have left the NHS in Scotland. Interboard transfers are excluded.

Nurses in training in Scotland as at 30 September 1991 (Provisional)

Health Board	*Number of nurses*
Argyll and Clyde	672
Ayrshire and Arran	459
Borders	168
Dumfries and Galloway	286
Fife	505
Forth Valley	494
Grampian	754
Greater Glasgow	2,712
Highland	347
Lanarkshire	782
Lothian	1,778
Tayside	991
Orkney	17
Shetland	10
Western Isles	30
Scotland	10,005

Between 1980 and 1991 the number of qualified nurses in the national health service in Scotland rose by 30 per cent. to over 36,400.

Textile Industry

24. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the specific steps he proposes to take to assist the Borders textile industry and promote diversification in the local economy in the region.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government recognise the importance of the textile industry to the economy and employment in the Borders and through Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Borders Enterprise are supporting initiatives designed to assist the industry in a variety of ways and to encourage economic diversification in the area. Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Borders Enterprise are in receipt of substantial Government funds.

The Scottish Office continues to examine ways of obtaining European Community funds for economic development in the Borders.

Power Lines

25. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultations he has had with Scottish Power about the construction of power lines in Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Before Scottish Power can construct any overhead power lines, it is required to receive the consent of the Secretary of State under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989. In the current financial year, 130 such applications have been received from the company and 93 applications have received consent.

Health Services

26. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends meeting the chairmen of health boards to discuss the provision of health services.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I will be meeting health board chairmen on Friday.

Steel Industry

27. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he has made to meet the Dalzell shop stewards to discuss their investment proposals which would establish a viable Scottish steel industry safeguarding the future of their plant and Ravenscraig.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I would be happy to meet the Dalzell shop stewards again to discuss the future of the plant.

New Towns

28. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the proposed wind-up of the Scottish new towns.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Following careful consideration of the responses to the recent consultation exercise, my right hon. Friend has decided to proceed with the wind-up of East Kilbride and Glenrothes development corporations.

The wind-up orders will be made next month and the target date for completion will be 31 December 1995.

Investment

30. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the value of inward investment in Scotland since 1979.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Figures prior to the establishment of Locate in Scotland in 1981 are not available.

From April 1981 to March 1991, Locate in Scotland has recorded planned inward investment in Scotland by companies, totalling some £4·2 billion.

RETEX Programme

31. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what approaches he has made to the European Commission regarding the RETEX programme.

Mr. Allan Stewart: On 20 December the European Commission agreed a draft proposal for a RETEX scheme designed to assist areas dependent on the textiles industry. Member states and the European Parliament will be invited formally to comment on the draft proposal in the coming weeks, although Scottish Office and other United Kingdom officials had already made representations to the Commission in earlier discussions. The United Kingdom Government will naturally seek to ensure the most effective coverage of United Kingdom textile areas while avoiding any unfair competition against United Kingdom producers.

Lanarkshire Economy

32. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are his plans for the regeneration of the Lanarkshire economy.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I look to Lanarkshire development agency, supported by Scottish Enterprise, to take the lead in implementing economic development measures, building on the early action programme recommended by the Lanarkshire working group.

In addition, the Government have formally notified the European Commission of proposals for an enterprise zone in north Lanarkshire.

Land Use

33. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of Her Majesty's Government regarding land use in Caithness and Sutherland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Land use in Caithness and Sutherland is primarily a matter for Highland regional council as the planning authority for the area. My right hon. Friend understands that the director of planning for Highland region proposed to the chairman designate of Scottish Natural Heritage the preparation of an integrated land use and development strategy for Caithness and Sutherland jointly by both bodies and, possibly, Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This proposal has been accepted in principle and will be taken forward as resources permit.

The Government welcome this initiative, which will build on work already done, such as the preparation of the land use strategy published by Highland regional council in 1989.

Rail Network

34. **Mr. Stephen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the electrification of the Scottish rail network and the provision of inter-city services north of the central belt.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has from time to time received representations from individuals, organisations and Members of Parliament on a variety of rail matters including further electrification. None however has been specifically concerned with inter-city services north of the central belt.

Council House Sales

35. **Mr. [illegible]:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland since May 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since April 1979 nearly 234,000 public sector houses in Scotland have been sold to sitting tenants. Included in that figure are nearly 173,000 sales by local authorities.

40. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many houses in Scotland have been sold under the right-to-buy legislation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Between October 1980 and September 1991, over 221,000 public sector houses have been sold under the right-to-buy legislation.

Dunbartonshire Enterprise

36. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last had discussions with Dunbartonshire Enterprise on the latest developments in the Scottish economy.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Communications between my right hon. Friend and me and the local enterprise companies take place chiefly through Scottish Enterprise; and we

have frequent discussions with the chairman and board members of Scottish Enterprise to discuss a range of matters, including developments in the Scottish economy.

New Forth Bridge

37. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the proposal to construct a further road bridge over the River Forth.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have already met Fife regional council and most recently with Lothian regional council to discuss with them the various transportation issues concerning future travel requirements west of Edinburgh and across the Forth estuary in Fife. I now propose to prepare a consultation document which will set out the options for measures to meet the growing traffic demands in this area which I hope to be in a position to issue in early spring.

Lockerbie

38. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action the Lord Advocate has taken in connection with the Lockerbie investigations since 20 January.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Lord Advocate has taken note of Security Council resolution 731 (1992) adopted unanimously on 21 January 1992 and looks for the early surrender by the Libyan authorities of the two accused persons for trial in Scotland or the United States. The Lord Advocate has continued to be kept informed of progress in the investigation.

Firearms

39. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives he intends to take to stop the increase of murder and serious assaults by the use of firearms.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Very strict controls are imposed on the acquisition and possession of firearms, one purpose of these measures being to restrict the ability of criminals to obtain firearms. Detecting illegally held firearms is a matter for the police who make strenuous efforts to prevent criminals acquiring firearms which they may subsequently use in committing crimes. The Government continue to provide substantial resources to assist the police in maintaining law and order: since 1979, police expenditure has risen by more than 50 per cent. in real terms. The Government will also continue to ensure that an adequate range of penalties is available to the courts to deal with crimes and offences involving firearms. With the assistance of the firearms consultative committee, the Government keep firearms control under continual review.

Toxic Waste (Glasgow)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Hamilton road route construction between Daldowie and Fullarton in the Glasgow, Shettleston constituency has unearthed any evidence of toxic waste material having been dumped in the area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Toxic material has been excavated and handled under controlled conditions within and arising from the activities of the former Cambuslang steel works adjacent to Fullarton road.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what evidence he has of chromium dumping or other dumping of potentially harmful material in the Baillieston, Carmyle, Broomhouse and Mount Vernon areas of the Glasgow, Shettleston constituency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Chromium waste may have been deposited at four sites in the area. Glasgow district council has undertaken a detailed investigation and has confirmed that there is no surface contamination. Industrial, commercial and household wastes have been deposited at 10 sites in the area.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of deaths in Scotland from mesothelioma during each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The figures requested are given in the table:

Deaths with any mention of mesothelioma on the death certificate, Scotland, 1986-90

	Number
1986	67
1987	93
1988	103
1989	113
1990	110

Population Statistics

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will register the latest estimates by the Registrar General of *(a)* total populations and *(b)* populations aged 18 years and over for each district council area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is given in the table. For clarity of presentation, the table includes figures for regions, island areas and the whole of Scotland.

	Estimated population, 30 June 1990	
	Total	*Aged 18 and over*
SCOTLAND	5,102,400	3,943,370
Borders Region	103,500	81,779
Berwickshire	19,070	15,034
Ettrick and Lauderdale	34,270	26,906
Roxburgh	34,990	27,906
Tweeddale	15,170	11,933
Central Region	272,100	209,617
Clackmannan	47,470	35,879
Falkirk	143,270	110,232
Stirling	81,360	63,506
Dumfries and Galloway Region	148,400	115,840
Annandale and Eskdale	36,580	28,802
Nithsdale	57,820	44,850
Stewartry	23,520	18,494
Wigtown	30,480	23,694
Fife Region	345,900	265,701
Dunfermline	129,910	98,424
Kirkcaldy	147,070	112,647
North East Fife	68,920	54,630

	Estimated population, 30 June 1990	
	Total	Aged 18 and over
Grampian Region	506,100	389,867
Aberdeen City	211,080	168,299
Banff and Buchan	85,020	64,336
Gordon	74,600	54,625
Kincardine and Deeside	50,920	38,259
Moray	84,480	64,348
Highland Region	204,300	154,740
Badenoch and Strathspey	11,190	8,733
Caithness	26,790	20,212
Inverness	63,090	48,102
Lochaber	19,030	14,236
Nairn	10,420	7,913
Ross and Cromarty	48,910	36,293
Skye and Lochalsh	11,820	8,993
Sutherland	13,050	10,258
Lothian Region	749,600	592,175
East Lothian	85,480	67,790
Edinburgh City	434,520	350,606
Midlothian	81,310	62,508
West Lothian	148,290	111,271
Strathclyde Region	2,306,000	1,771,676
Argyll and Bute	66,150	50,427
Bearsden and Milngavie	40,900	32,220
Clydebank	46,920	36,568
Clydesdale	58,560	44,526
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	63,100	46,837
Cumnock and Doon Valley	43,030	32,915
Cunninghame	137,530	103,611
Dumbarton	79,750	59,679
East Kilbride	83,060	64,516
Eastwood	61,010	47,443
Glasgow City	689,210	537,732
Hamilton	106,560	80,166
Inverclyde	93,470	72,019
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	81,110	61,693
Kyle and Carrick	113,730	89,166
Monklands	104,460	77,900
Motherwell	146,760	111,141
Renfrew	201,030	155,032
Strathkelvin	89,660	68,085
Tayside Region	394,000	307,497
Angus	95,370	73,196
Dundee City	172,860	135,060
Perth and Kinross	125,770	99,241
Orkney Islands Area	19,570	14,935
Shetland Islands Area	22,270	16,328
Western Isles Islands Area	30,660	23,215

"Higher Education: A New Framework"

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the outcome of consultation on proposed changes to institutional financial years, made in paragraph 94 of the White Paper "Higher Education: A New Framework", Cm 1541.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Representative bodies, following consultation, have confirmed their agreement to adopt a financial year of 1 August to 31 July. Subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Bill, I can therefore confirm that those institutions which are to receive funding from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council will operate on a financial year of 1 August to 31 July. This means that the financial year for universities will not change, and that grant-aided colleges of higher education will move from their present financial year which runs from 1 April to 31 March. The 1992-93 financial year for those institutions in receipt of funding from the council will, therefore, end on 31 July 1993; the 1993-94 financial year will operate from 1 August 1993 to 31 July 1994 and subsequent financial years shall be each successive period of 12 months.

Regional Development Assistance

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total regional development assistance to Scotland, in constant terms in each year since 1973-74.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* The information requested is given in the table.

Gross expenditure on regional preferential assistance

	Constant 1990-91 prices £ million
1973-74	595·8
1974-75	653·6
1975-76	820·1
1976-77	680·1
1977-78	401·2
1978-79	396·8
1979-80	305·9
1980-81	363·8
1981-82	392·7
1982-83	577·5
1983-84	341·5
1984-85	266·4
1985-86	265·6
1986-87	316·4
1987-88	189·7
1988-89	174·7
1989-90	156·9
1990-91	159·2

Note: Includes gross expenditure in Scotland on Regional Selective Assistance, Regional Development Grants, Regional Enterprise Grants, Scottish Development Agency and Highlands and Islands Development Board expenditure on grants and land and factory building. The figures also include a number of forms of assistance in the years up to 1982 which have been discontinued.

Part-time Workers

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will estimate the percentage of all women part-time workers in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the regions and islands areas of Scotland earning less than (i) £2·50 per hour, (ii) £3 per hour, (iii) £3·60 per hour, (iv) £4 per hour, (v) £4·50 per hour and (vi) £5 per hour;

(2) if he will estimate the percentage of women part-time manual workers in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the regions and islands areas of Scotland earning less than (i) £2·50 per hour, (ii) £3 per hour, (iii) £3·60 per hour, (iv) £4 per hour, (v) £4·50 per hour and (vi) £5 per hour;

(3) if he will estimate the percentage of women part-time non-manual workers in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the regions and islands areas of Scotland earning less than (i) £2·50 per hour, (ii) £3 per hour, (iii) £3·60 per hour, and (iv) £4 per hour, (v) £4·50 per hour and (vi) £5 per hour.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* Information at the level of detail requested is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member giving the

requested information, where sample sizes allow, as soon as possible. A copy of the letter will be placed in the library.

Skye Bridge

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the EC guidelines governing the carrying out of an environmental impact assessment for major infrastructure projects; if he will make a statement on the relationship of the proposed Skye bridge public local inquiry proceedings to the guidelines; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* The requirements for an environmental impact assessment on major infrastructure projects are set out in EC directive No. 85/337/EEC and the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1988: The relevant guidance is contained in Scottish Office circular 13/88. A comprehensive environmental statement on Skye bridge has been published and will be fully considered at the public local inquiry.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what restrictions there are on whether the proposed Skye bridge public local inquiry can commence in the absence of an environmental impact assessment having been submitted; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* The Scottish office has published a comprehensive environmental statement which addresses the various issues involved. The environmental statement is the result an environmental impact assessment and has been published under part VI of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1988, in accordance with EC council directive No. 85/337/EEC.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the threshold below which the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board will not entertain a claim; and what were the lower limits in each year since 1986.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* The current minimum level of criminal injuries compensation is £1,000. The lower limits applying in each year since 1986 can be derived from the following table:

Date of increase	*Minimum limit* £
February 1983	400
November 1986	550
February 1990	750
January 1992	1,000

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many victims of crimes of violence received compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme in 1991-92; and what was the total amount awarded.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* Figures for 1991-92 are not yet available, but it is estimated that outturn expenditure by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on compensation to victims of crimes of violence committed throughout Great Britain will be of the order of £144·6 million. In 1990-91, £109·3 million was paid to 35,190 victims.

Victim Support Groups

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much funding he gave victim support groups in 1991-92; and how much is planned for 1992-93.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* For the financial year 1991-92 the Scottish Office initially awarded the Scottish Association of Victim Support Schemes (SAVSS) a total grant of £442,000.

I hope to announce the grant for 1992-93 shortly.

Maternity Units, Glasgow

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future provision of maternity units in Greater Glasgow.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* This is a matter for greater Glasgow health board. In announcing my approval to the provision of a new maternity unit at Glasgow royal infirmary, I asked the board to develop a long-term strategy for maternity services in Glasgow.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 30 January 1992

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Tribunals (Allowances)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General what are the rates of subsistence allowance payable to persons attending hearings of tribunals as chairpersons, tribunal members, appellants, appellants' representatives, members of the Council on Tribunals, tribunal officers and other officials; and on what basis these allowances are fixed.

The Attorney-General: Chairpersons, tribunal members, members of the Council on Tribunals, tribunal officers and other officials may, in certain limited circumstances, be paid a day subsistence allowance of £3·90 or £8·60, depending on the time spent on duty. They may also be paid an overnight subsistence allowance of £98·70 or £68·50 in London, or £85·85 or £63·15 elsewhere, depending on rank, if they are obliged to attend at a place not within daily travelling distance of their home. These are the rates generally applicable throughout the public service. Most tribunals do not pay subsistence allowances to appellants or appellants' representatives, but there are exceptions, for example, the social security commissioners, and in those cases the rates paid are generally linked to standard public service rates.

TRANSPORT

London Travel Statistics

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he possesses and for what date of the approximate percentage of private car drivers entering or leaving central London each day during *(a)* weekday peak periods, *(b)* weekday non-peak periods, *(c)* at weekends and *(d)* any other period whose movement costs are not wholly met from their taxable income.

Mr. McLoughlin: A survey in April 1989 found that 48 per cent. of cars entering central London on a weekday during the morning peak—7 to 10 am—were privately owned and 52 per cent. were paid for, owned or leased by an employer or company. The corresponding proportions during the off-peak—10 am to 1 pm—were 52 and 48 per cent. respectively.

About three quarters of the privately owned cars in the peak period, and two thirds in the off peak, received some form of travel assistance from their employer or company for the journey being undertaken. Travel assistance could take the form of tax relief—for the self-employed—provision of parking, mileage allowance or payment for parking charges or fuel.

More detailed information is available in TRRL research report 326, "Company Travel Assistance in the London area" and I shall arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Information for other times of the day and at weekends is not available.

Safety Belts

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to require all new saloon motor vehicles sold in the United Kingdom to have three cross-body safety belts in the rear seats.

Mr. Chope: One manufacturer has now introduced three point belts for rear centre seating on some models. I hope that other manufacturers will follow this lead. It would not be possible to make this compulsory without the agreement of the European Community.

Licensed Vehicles

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department holds on the number of licensed vehicles in the United Kingdom, by region.

Mr. Chope: The records kept at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency show the total number of vehicles licensed in the United Kingdom, by region, as at 31 December 1990 were as follows:

Number of licensed vehicles

Region	*Thousands*
Northern	1,104
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,995
East Midlands	1,758
East Anglia	1,097
South East	8,229
South West	2,403
West Midlands	2,456
North West	2,566
Scotland	1,811
Wales	1,222
Not known	32
Total Great Britain	24,673
Northern Ireland	543
Total United Kingdom	25,216

Cornelis Johanna

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, further to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *270*, when he expects to receive advice as the extent of his Department's liability to the present owners of the Cornelis Johanna.

Mr. McLoughlin: I expect to receive advice in February.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Waste Oil

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will bring forward proposals to equalise the tax treatment of waste oil disposed of as furnace oil with that of waste oil disposed of in other ways.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Tobacco

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what limit will be imposed on the quantity of tobacco products which an individual may import into the United Kingdom from other EC countries for personal consumption after 1993.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: From 1 January 1993 there will be no restriction on tobacco products purchased duty-paid in another EC country and brought into the United Kingdom by private individuals for their personal use. To help distinguish genuine private importations from those of a commercial nature liable to United Kingdom duty, the following indicative levels will apply in accordance with the agreement reached at the ECOFIN Council on 16 December 1991:

800 Cigarettes
400 Cigarillos
200 Cigars
1·0 kg Smoking tobacco

The December ECOFIN meeting also decided to retain duty-free shopping for travel within the EC until 1 July 1999. Travellers will be able to purchase duty-free tobacco products up to the level of the current duty free allowance, in addition to any goods they have obtained from duty-paid sources.

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action the Customs and Excise will take to prevent smuggling of tobacco products from other EC countries into the United Kingdom after 1993.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Customs and Excise are planning a range of anti-smuggling measures for 1993. These will be largely intelligence based, allowing additional inland resources to be targeted to both detect and deter any growth in illicit trade. This strategy will be supported by the minimum indicative levels agreed at the 16 December ECOFIN which will help to distinguish private purchases for personal consumption from commercial trade.

The Department of Health's Tobacco Labelling Regulations, which require health warnings in English on all tobacco products sold in the United Kingdom, will also aid identification of illicit importations.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give an estimate of the regional distribution of the number of taxpayers with total allowances and reliefs in excess of £10,000, £15,000 and £20,000 referred to in the reply given to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), on 21 January, *Official Report*, column *128*.

Mr. Maude: I regret that this information is not available on a regional basis.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the estimated receipts from privatisation, including debt repayments, in 1991-92, identifying the industry concerned in each case.

Mr. Maude: Estimated privatisation proceeds including debt repayments for 1991-92 are shown in the following table, by industry.

Forecast privatisation proceeds in 1991-92

Privatisation	*£ million*
Electricity (England and Wales)	[1]3,507
BT	[1]1,945
Water Holding Companies	1,490
Electricity (Scotland)	[1]1,192
NTL	68
Forestry Commission	16
Insurance Services	10
Motorway Service Area leases	5
Miscellaneous[2]	−233
TOTAL	8,000

[1] Gross proceeds (costs yet to be reported to Parliament).
[2] Includes costs arising from the electricity and BT sales.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the estimated receipts from repayment of debt from privatised electricity companies have been varied in amount or timing from those given in the various prospectuses at the time of flotation.

Mr. Maude: No. the precise timing of redemption of such debt depends on future decisions.

BT Loan Stocks

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total receipts by the Government from British Telecom loan stocks will be after 31 March.

Mr. Maude: The value of the outstanding BT loan stock held by the Government after 31 March 1992 will be £2,186 million.

British Gas (Debt Repayment)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total debt repayable to the Government by British Gas will be after 31 March.

Mr. Maude: The total debt repayable to the Government by British Gas plc after 31 March 1992 will be £350 million.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the 1992 departmental reports to be published.

Mr. Mellor: Proposed publication dates for 1992 departmental reports are as follows:

1992 Departmental reports: proposed publication dates

Statistical Supplement to the Autumn Statement—Friday 31 January
Ministry of Defence—Thursday 6 February
Department of Energy—Thursday 6 February
Department of Education and Science—Thursday 6 February
Department of Health and Office of Population Censuses and Surveys—Tuesday 11 February
Office of Arts and Libraries—Tuesday 11 February
Chancellor of the Exchequer's departments and net payments to EC institutions—Wednesday 12 February
Home Office (including Charity Commission) Wednesday 12 February
Department of the Environment—Wednesday 12 February
Foreign and Commonwealth Office (including ODA)—Wednesday 12 February
Department of Trade and Industry—Wednesday 12 February
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Intervention Board—Thursday 13 February

Department of Social Security—Thursday 13 February
Department of Transport—Thursday 13 February
Cabinet Office—Friday 14 February
Department of Employment—Friday 14 February
Legal departments—Friday 14 February
Scotland—Friday 14 February
Wales—Friday 14 February
Northern Ireland—Friday 14 February

Copies will be made available at the Vote Office.

HMSO

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what financial target he has set Her Majesty's Stationery Office for 1992.

Mr. Maples: I have today laid a further Treasury minute setting HMSO the financial target for 1992 of achieving a profit after interest in current cost accounting terms of £6 million. This compares with the target for 1991 of a profit after interest in current cost accounting terms of £4 million.

Rents

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the average rent paid by persons earning less than £10,000 per year.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

The latest information from the 1990 family expenditure survey shows that the estimated mean weekly rent of households in rented accommodation in England, where the head of household has an annual gross income of less than £10,000,is £27 or £14 net of housing benefit.

Local Authority Borrowing

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish figures showing the total *(a)* borrowing requirement and *(b)* indebtedness attributable to local authorities in the United Kingdom for each year since 1979; and what estimates he has for each year since 1979 of the total indebtedness repaid by the use of capital receipts from the exercise of the right-to-buy provisions.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply.

The borrowing requirement for authorities in the United Kingdom and The total indebtedness for all English authorities from 1979-80 to 1989-90 is as follows. The proportion of receipts generated by the right-to-buy provisions that have been applied to reduce local authority indebtedness are not available.

£ million

	Borrowing Requirement	*Total Indebtedness*
1979-80	2,969	30,187
1980-81	2,120	32,076
1981-82	−224	34,069
1982-83	83	36,231
1983-84	1,209	38,698
1984-85	2,387	40,554
1985-86	1,674	40,138
1986-87	149	43,033
1987-88	1,355	44,904
1988-89	339	47,295
1989-90	1,321	48,695
1990-91	3,431	n/a

(Source: Department of the Environment returns and Central Statistical Office.)

Note: Figures provided for the borrowing requirement are for the United Kingdom as a whole; figures for total authority indebtedness are for England only.

ENERGY

Research Institutes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list by standard region *(a)* the research institutes operated for, or on behalf of, his Department and the total employment thereat and *(b)* the total number of such institutes and the total employment therein; and if he will express the regional totals as a percentage of the national totals.

Mr. John Wakeham: My Department is responsible for one such institute: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority which operates from nine sites as follows:

Region	*Number of sites*	*Numbers employed, end-1991*	*Region as per cent. of national total employed*
Scotland	1	1,650	18·4
North	1	512	5·7
North West	3	1,594	17·8
South East	3	3,912	43·6
South West	1	1,301	14·5
TOTAL	9	8,969	100·0

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the nuclear installations inspectorate regarding the anticipated date of completion of consideration of the long-term safety reviews of Sizewell A, and Dungeness A Magnox nuclear power stations.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. However, officials in the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate keep my officials informed about the progress of these reviews.

Nuclear Research

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the organisations and individuals from whom his Department received comments on his departmental consultation paper on nuclear research and development; and when he expects to come to conclusions on the responses.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Department has received substantive comments from almost 100 organisations and individuals.

The largest group of responses, some 30 per cent. of the total, were from suppliers or potential suppliers of goods and services to the nuclear industry. Some 20 per cent. were from the research or higher education field. Ten per cent. came from the energy industries. The remainder of the comments came from other Government Departments or agencies, campaigning organisations, trade unions and professional associations and private individuals.

I hope to publish a strategy for the Department's nuclear R and D programmes, which will take into account comments received on the consultation document, in the near future.

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the existing nuclear operating regime will apply to the Sizewell B PWR nuclear power station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The treatment of Sizewell B by the Government and the appropriate regulatory authorities will be no different from that of Nuclear Electric's existing stations.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what analysis has been made of the reasons why the fees paid out for advice on electricity privatisation in 1990-91 exceeded the original estimate.

Mr. Wakeham: The figure included in the main supply estimates for 1990-91 was based on the best estimate available in November 1989. Continuing and regular reassessments were made of the resources needed to complete the successful flotation of the electricity supply industry in that year. It was these that led to the additional provision which was sought, and approved by Parliament, in the 1990-91 spring supplementary estimates.

ENVIRONMENT

Limestone Pavement

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of sites of limestone pavement that have been notified for protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the number that have had orders made in north Yorkshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Derbyshire, and any other part of England where pavements exist; and how soon the process will be completed.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the relevant authorities of Cumbria county council, the Lake District special planning board, Lancashire county council and the north Yorkshire county council have determined to protect by orders all those areas of limestone pavement notified to them by English Nature and the Countryside Commission. It is estimated that this programme will be completed by the end of summer 1994.

So far orders have been made as follows:

	Number of orders
Cumbria (including the National Park)	22
Lancashire	10
North Yorkshire	9

Opencast Mining Pollution

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what forms of compensation there are for households in opencast mining areas for the effects of noise, pollution and heavy road traffic.

Mr. Yeo: The planning system provides the basis on which the appropriateness of particular development proposals is assessed, and the effect on the surrounding area will be a material factor in that assessment. Apart from this, it is open to aggrieved people to undertake civil actions for nuisance.

Sprinkler Systems

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he intends to make it obligatory to evacuate a building constructed on the trade-off principle if the sprinkler system becomes inoperative for any reason.

Mr. Yeo: Provision for the ongoing maintenance of sprinklers installed for the purpose of Building Regulations in non-certificated premises will be included in regulations to be made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department. These will be made under section 12 of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and are intended to take effect on 1 June 1992. Fire officers enforcing those regulations will wish to ensure that adequate alternative arrangements are made whenever a sprinkler becomes inoperative during the time a building is occupied. Such measures may include fire safety management procedures, and may need to involve a partial restriction or prohibition on the use of all or part of the premises.

Research Institutes

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by standard region *(a)* the research institutes operated for, or on behalf of, his Department and the total employment thereat and *(b)* the total number of such institutes and the total employment therein; and if he will express the regional totals as a percentage of the national totals.

Mr. Heseltine: My Department's only research institution is the Building Research Establishment at Garston, Watford. It has been an executive agency since April 1990. It carries out work for other customers as well as my Department. It employs such staff as are necessary to carry out its work. Staff numbers are currently the equivalent of 703·5 full-time employees.

Building Regulations

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures will be required under the new building regulations to cater for any change in use of a building, its layout and its contents.

Mr. Yeo: The Building Regulations 1991, which will come into effect on 1 June 1992, impose requirements on certain building operations including the making of a "material change of use", as defined in regulation 5. Regulation 6 sets out those requirements of schedule 1 to the regulations which must be satisfied where there is a material change of use, and provides that such work must be carried out as is necessary to ensure that the building, or that part of it where the material change of use is being made, complies with those requirements. The table sets out what those requirements are for each particular case of change of use.

It is quite possible that changes in the internal layout of a building may adversely affect the building in relation to compliance with one of the relevant requirements, for example paragraph B1—means of escape. In such cases the change will be regarded as "material" for the purposes of the Building Regulations, and the building owner will be required to ensure that the work complies with the regulations and that the building as a whole is not made more unsatisfactory.

The contents of a building are not normally of any relevance to the Building Regulations, although they may of course indicate the use to which a building is being put. It is possible that, in certain circumstances, a change in the contents of a building may be regarded as a material change of use of the building for the purposes of the regulations.

Building regulations requirements which must be satisfied where there is a material change of use

Change of use	*All cases of material change of use*	*All cases where building is over 15m in height*[1]	*Change of use to a hotel or boarding house, institution, or public building, or where the building was previously exempt*	*Change of use to a dwelling*	*Creation of a flat*
Requirement(s) of Schedule 1 that the building (or part[1]) should comply with	B1 (Means of escape) B2 (Internal fire spread—linings) B3 (Internal fire spread—structure) B4(2) (External fire spread—roofs) B5 (Access and facilities for the fire service) F (Ventilation) G1 (Sanitary conveniences and washing facilities) G2 (Bathrooms) H4 (Solid waste storage) J (Heat producing appliances)	B4(1) (External fire spread—walls)	A (Structure)	C4 (Resistance to weather and ground moisture) E (Resistance to the passage of sound)	E (Resistance to the passage of sound)

[1] Regulation 6(2)(c) provides that even where the change of use is being made to part only of a building exceeding 15m in height, the whole building must comply with requirement B4(1).

Home Safety

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make home safety a mandatory function for local authorities.

Mr. Key: My Department has no such plans.

City Challenge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many local authorities he expects to be awarded city challenge money in the current round of competition; and on what date he will be announcing the results.

Mr. Portillo: The Department of the Environment and other Government Departments are currently considering the action plans submitted by the 11 city challenge pacemakers on 6 January. Points arising from the plans are being discussed with individual authorities so that decisions can be reached as soon as possible.

European Environment Agency

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the reasons why no permanent site has been agreed to date for the European environment agency.

Mr. Baldry: A decision about location has been delayed because the agency is one of a number of new EC institutions yet to be sited somewhere in the Community. Agreement on the siting of the agency is at present dependent upon agreement on the package as a whole. The issue of where the European Parliament should meet in the future in particular is holding up progress.

Homelessness

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what specific account he takes of net expenditure by borough councils on homelessless as part of his structure of standard spending assessment for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The total of standard spending assessments has been set in the light of the spending needs of all authorities including an allowance for appropriate expenditure on providing for the homeless.

Business Rates

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will tabulate the annual income and expenditure on disbursements into and from the national non-domestic rates pool for each year of its operation together with his estimates of such operations for the year 1992-93.

Mr. Key: The amounts of non-domestic rates distributed from, and contributed to the central pool for England in 1990-91 were:

Distributable Amount (£000)	*Contributions (£000)*
10,428,500	10,733,421

The amounts which are being, or to be distributed and which it is estimated will be paid into the pool in 1991-92 and 1992-93 are:

	Distributable Amount (£000)	*Contributions (£000)*
1991-92	12,408,000	11,992,289
1992-93	12,306,000	12,339,000

The contributions for 1990-91 are currently being adjusted to reflect the amount of rates actually collectable from businesses in that year. It is estimated that those contributions will be reduced by about £127 million as a result of the adjustments. Contributions for 1991-92 will be adjusted during 1992-93.

Nursery Education

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account he takes of the need for, or number of places currently provided in, nursery education in inner city areas when calculating his standard spending assessment for relevant local authorities; and if he will state the arithmetic or other formula used for any such calculations.

Mr. Key: Provision for nursery education is made within the standard spending assessment for under-fives education. This is based on the numbers of children aged

under five resident in each relevant authority with allowances for extra costs associated with additional educational needs and higher costs in London and the south-east. Details are given in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), which is in the Library.

Environmental Policy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the ways in which Her Majesty's Government intend to work closely with the European Parliament in the coming months on environmental policy.

Mr. Baldry: The Government already consult, brief and exchange views with Members of the European Parliament on a regular basis. However, to achieve the smooth passage of Environment Council business during the United Kingdom presidency in the second half of this year, we will be developing further our contacts with the European Parliament and its environment committee.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimate of the personal social services share of reductions in rate or revenue support grant for England as a whole for each year since 1978-79 at 1991-92 prices, when calculated by applying to the grant reductions the share that personal social services spending made up of total local authority spending each year and using relevant expenditure in each year except for *(a)* net expenditure met by rents, rates and balances for 1978-79 to 1980-81, *(b)* budgeted net revenue expenditure for 1990-91 and *(c)* standard spending assessments for the current year.

Mr. Key: Revenue support grant, like its predecessor rate support grant, is paid to local authorities in support of general revenue expenditure. It would not therefore be appropriate to try to attribute amounts of grant to specific services.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to publish his Department's regulations governing the contained use of genetically modified organisms and outdoor releases of genetically modified organisms following his consultations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Consultations on the proposed regulations were completed on 22 January and my Department and other interested governmental parties are currently analysing the results. The regulations will be laid as soon as possible after the issues raised by the comments received have been considered and resolved.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library the draft regulations on the council tax upon which the local authority associations are being consulted through the council tax technical sub-group.

Mr. Portillo: I am arranging for copies of the draft regulations already sent to the local authority associations to be placed in the Library of the House and for further drafts to be placed there as they are issued.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* based upon the information contained in annex VIII of his local government statement of 26 November, showing for each local authority area listed on pages 2 to 13 *(a)* income from the community charge for standard spending, *(b)* business rate income and *(c)* revenue support grant in each case as a percentage of standard spending assessment, with each local authority being listed in ascending order according to the percentage size of its revenue support grant.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 29 January 1992]:* A table containing the information requested has been placed in the Library.

Thurrock Borough Council

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much Government grant has been paid to Thurrock borough council since April 1987 for expenditure on Thurrock borough council's housing stock.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* Thurrock borough council was not entitled to housing subsidy for the financial years 1987-88 to 1989-90. Housing revenue account subsidy, introduced on 1 April 1990, replaced housing subsidy and incorporated rent rebate subsidy which was previously paid to local authorities by the Department of Social Security. The council has claimed housing revenue account subsidy as follows:

	£
1990-91	6,432,848
1991-92	7,170,427

In addition, Thurrock has received housing capital allocations, including housing investment programme allocations, part of which will have been used for expenditure on its own stock. These allocations may be supplemented by the authority's own resources, and for the years in question total:

	£
1987-88	2,359,000
1988-89	2,044,000
1989-90	1,839,000
New Capital Finance System[1]	
1990-91	3,305,000
1991-92	[2]4,063,000

[1] Changes made at the time of introduction of the new capital finance system in 1990-91 mean that the levels of allocations before and after that date are not comparable.
[2] Provisional estimate of final allocation.

Wild-Caught Bird Trade

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will commission and fund a study on a case-by-case basis into which bird species are likely to benefit from the wild-caught bird trade, as recommended on page 3 of the recent Joint Nature Conservancy Council report on international trade in wildlife.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* The Government already support studies of the potential impact of wildlife trade throughout the world through its subscription to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. The JNCC and the royal botanic gardens, Kew, also monitor the wildlife trade generally on our behalf. We will keep the need for further research under review.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to introduce registration and possession controls for all Convention on Trade in Endangered Species appendix 1 species held in the United Kingdom, as recommended on page 3 of the recent Joint Nature Conservancy Council report on international trade in wildlife.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* I wrote to the European Commission in October urging it to propose stricter controls on the trade in appendix 1 species. The Commission reported in December that it planned to publish proposals shortly, and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside pressed for early progress on these. We shall be giving urgent attention to the proposals when they are published.

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those birds species that *(a)* have benefited and *(b)* are likely to benefit from the international trade in wild-caught birds.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* Comprehensive information on species which have benefited from trade is not readily available. Properly controlled trade can provide an incentive for the better management of many species. The same general principles can be applied to the bird trade as to trade in other species mentioned in the JNCC report.

Defence Estate

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken to ensure that local authorities will receive sufficient information from the Ministry of Defence to ensure that land forming part of the defence estate is noted in their registers of potentially contaminated land.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have been asked to reply.

There is a close liaison between the Ministry of Defence and the Department of the Environment concerning the implications for the defence estate of the public registers of land which may be contaminated to be compiled under section 143 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. In addition, the MOD is working with the DOE to prepare a profile of potentially contaminative uses of defence land which is designed to assist local authorities to compile register entries. The MOD will respond positively at the appropriate time to local authority requests for information, subject to the constraints of national security.

WALES

Radon Gas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the total number of deaths from lung cancer in Wales and the estimated proportion of deaths caused by exposure to radon gas.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: During 1990 there were 1,976 deaths from lung cancer in Wales. It is not possible to give an accurate estimate of how many, if any, of these were caused by exposure to radon. The National Radiological Protection Board estimates that 5 per cent. of lung cancer deaths in the United Kingdom may be attributable to exposure to radon.

Information on lung cancer deaths in years prior to 1990 is contained in the OPCS publication "Mortality Statistics: Area"—Series DH5—which is available in the Library of the House.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects local authorities in Wales to finalise their new arrangements for waste disposal sites.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: By September 1992.

Children's Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan health authority concerning the date on which the children's ear, nose and throat operating theatres will be transferred from the Children's Ear, Nose and Throat hospital, Cowbridge road west, Ely, Cardiff, to the University hospital of Wales, the Heath, Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is an operational matter for the authority.

Primary School Classes

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of children in primary classes in Wales in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1991, in classes of (i) 31 to 35, (ii) 36 to 39 and (iii) 40 and above.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on the number of children in primary classes is not held centrally in the form requested. The table gives the number of ordinary classes in primary schools by size of class. Data for 1991 are not yet available.

	31 to 35	*36 to 40*	*41 and over*
1988	1,602	132	8
1990	1,634	97	9

Figures relate to September of the academic year.

Public Opinion Surveys

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the public opinion surveys carried out by his Department since 22 July 1991.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* None.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 30 January.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been having important discussions today with President Yeltsin on his first visit abroad as President of an independent Russia. My right hon. Friend will be meeting President Bush this evening after his arrival in New York to chair a meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

UN Environment and Development Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the organisations invited, and the criteria for inviting them, to his meeting with non-governmental organisations on 5 February to explore the prospects for the United Nations conference on environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in June.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

Participants in the seminar on 5 February have been invited in their personal capacity, not as representatives of organisations. Leading figures from environment and development groups and business were asked to nominate appropriate individuals to receive invitations to the seminar. The choice of whom to nominate was left entirely to them.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy, in his discussions with President Yeltsin on 30 January, to raise the outstanding verification problems that hinder the completion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

No.

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Alliance of Womens Organisations

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the National Alliance of Womens Organisations; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will provide financial support to the National Alliance of Womens Organisations.

Mrs. Rumbold: We recognise the practical advice this body provides for some women's organisations. We have provisionally decided to give NAWO a small grant in 1992-93 to help with administrative costs. This is subject to approval by Treasury and by Parliament.

Police Truncheon (Replacement)

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will authorise the replacement of the present police short truncheon with the American side handled baton.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The procurement of equipment is the responsibility of chief officers of police. We are prepared to arrange for a scientific evaluation of any equipment which might assist in public order control if chief officers request it.

Knife-proof Vests

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will carry out an urgent evaluation of a knife-proof vest for police foot patrols.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office police scientific development branch recently completed research on stab resistant materials. We are ready to undertake further scientific research into new products if requested to do so by chief officers.

Firearms

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been carried out by his Department since the enactment of the Firearms Act 1982 of the extent to which imitation firearms now on sale can be converted to fire live ammunition without any special skill using tools in common use.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Firearms Act 1982 any imitation firearm which is readily convertible to fire live ammunition is subject to the same strict licensing controls as a "real" firearm. Since that Act came into effect, it has been normal practice for manufacturers and retailers to submit model firearms to the Home Office forensic science service for an assessment of their status before releasing them for sale.

Asylum Seekers

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each month how many asylum applications were decided *(a)* by the granting of refugee status, *(b)* by the granting of exceptional leave to remain and *(c)* by the refusal to either; and, of those granted refugee status or leave to remain, how many were port applicants for asylum and how many were lawfully in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Available monthly information for 1990 and the first half of 1991 is given in the table. Corresponding information for the second half of 1991 is not yet available.

Decisions[1 2 3] on applications[3] for asylum in the United Kingdom

Number of applications[1]

	Granted asylum			*Granted exceptional leave*			
	Applied at port	*Applied after entry[4]*	*Total granted asylum*	*Applied at port*	*Applied after entry[4]*	*Total granted exceptional leave*	*Refused asylum or exceptional leave*
1990							
January	105	55	160	240	75	320	60
February	80	35	115	180	60	240	55
March	60	40	95	165	45	210	40
April	45	25	65	170	60	235	45
May	30	20	55	150	55	210	90
June	25	35	60	80	50	130	45
July	40	35	75	85	75	165	45
August	30	25	55	75	60	135	45
September	55	20	75	180	85	270	70
October	90	20	110	125	75	200	70
November	40	40	75	130	100	230	80
December	15	35	55	60	35	90	55
1991[5]							
January	20	30	55	395	115	510	90
February	10	20	30	135	110	250	85
March	5	30	40	70	65	135	115
April	10	25	30	20	65	85	115
May	10	30	35	20	45	65	110
June	5	20	25	15	40	55	70

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest 5.
[3] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same year.
[4] Comprehensive information on the immigration status of these applicants is not readily available.
[5] 1991 figures are likely to understate because of delays in recording.

Police (Body Armour)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to provide body armour to all the police forces for the protection of officers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The procurement of equipment for forces is entirely a matter for chief officers. I understand that all forces have body armour available for officers when an operational need can be foreseen. The Home Office is ready to undertake scientific research into new products if requested so to do by chief officers.

DNA Profiles

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy in respect of the retention of the paper copy of DNA profiles taken from persons cleared of an offence as part of the case record; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Paper records of DNA profiles are retained by forensic science laboratories for audit and quality assurance purposes.

Prison Estate

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce his conclusions on the further review of the prison estate.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I have considered very carefully the large number of representations received following my announcement on 24 July 1991, *Official Report*, column 596, of the proposals which had emerged from the review of the prison estate. The proposals included changes to the roles of 15 establishments, and the closure of seven establishments as well as units at Her Majesty's prison Drake Hall, Her Majesty's prison Highpoint and Her Majesty's prison Norwich.

Since these proposals were made the prison population has risen and the prison service has had to resort to very high levels of police cell use to accommodate prisoners. Yesterday there were 1,244 prisoners in police cells. The use of police cells in this way is entirely unacceptable and I do not now believe that it would be right to continue with the proposed closures, except for Her Majesty's remand centre Pucklechurch and the open unit at Her Majesty's prison Highpoint in 1993-94. I therefore now intend that the establishments in the following list should continue in operation for at least the next two years and subject where appropriate to changes of role.

HMYOI Kirklevington
To convert to adult use.

HMYOI Werrington
To remain as a young offender institution.

HMP Hewell Grange
To continue for the present in its temporary role as an adult open prison.

HMYOI Finnamore Wood Camp
To remain as a young offender institution.

HMP Oxford
Closure to be deferred and to be used as a decanting facility by London establishments during the present period of large scale refurbishment.

HMP Aldington
To remain as a training prison.

HMP Norwich (Britannia)
Closure to be deferred and to be used temporarily to relieve the main establishment while work goes ahead to install integral sanitation.

HMP Drake Hall
The proposal to mothball one unit will not now go ahead.

I have also reached the following conclusions in respect of the proposed changes of role:

HMYOI Castington
To be retained as a young offender institution.

HMYOI Deerbolt

To establish a juvenile unit within existing buildings.

HMP Nottingham

To be retained as a training establishment.

HMYOI Lancaster Farms

To be used as a remand centre as well as a young offender institution.

HMP Risley

To be used as both a local and training prison as new accommodation comes into use.

HMP Leeds

To be used as both a training and a local prison as new accommodation comes into use.

HMP Stafford

Further consideration will be given to the proposal for this establishment to be converted in part to a local prison in 1995-96.

HMP Gloucester

One wing to be used as a remand centre.

HMYOI Eastwood Park

To close as a young offender institution (1992-93) and re-open as a female establishment (1993-94).

HMYOI Hollesley Bay Colony

To convert in part to adult use.

HMP Bedford

To convert in part to a remand centre. But further consideration will be given to whether it will in addition be necessary to use some of the accommodation at HMP Woodhill as a remand centre.

HMP Reading

To convert to a remand centre.

HMP Elmley

To open as part local and part category C training prison.

HMP Coldingley

To convert from a category B to a category C training prison.

HMYOI Guys Marsh

Further consideration will be given to the most effective way of providing an adequate number of remand centre places in the south of England. It is now proposed that for the time being Guys Marsh will be used to hold adult male sentenced prisoners as well as young offenders.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ghana and Guatemala

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how much government aid, other than humanitarian aid, was given to *(a)* Guatemala and *(b)* Ghana in each of the last three years.

Mrs. Chalker: United Kingdom bilateral aid to Ghana and Guatemala in the past three United Kingdom financial years was:

£ thousands

	Ghana	*Guatemala*
1988-89	33,558	12
1989-90	33,150	61
1990-91	25,193	72

These figures exclude disaster relief and food aid, being classified as humanitarian aid—Ghana £5,000 in 1989-90 and £32,000 in 1990-91; Guatemala £29,000 in 1989-90.

The figures do not include Commonwealth Development Corporation funds—Ghana £4·2 million in 1990 calendar year—or the United Kingdom share of aid through multilateral institutions.

International Organisations

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much Britain contributed financially to *(a)* International Labour Organisation, *(b)* Food and Agriculture Organisation, *(c)* International Food and Agriculture Development, *(d)* United Nations Development Programme, *(e)* World Food Programme, *(f)* UNICEF, *(g)* United Nations High Commission for Refugees, *(h)* United Nations Food for Population Articles and *(i)* United Nations Environment Programme, in cash and real terms for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Chalker: Contributions were as follows, using Her Majesty's Treasury's GDP deflator for the real terms data:

United Kingdom contributions to multilateral agencies 1979-90 in real terms (1990 prices)

£ thousands

Organisations	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
International Labour Organisation	4,871	5,233	3,194	4,620	5,553	5,749	6,252	5,071	4,701	4,881	6,031	5,832
Food and Agriculture Organisation	5,543	6,013	6,066	8,718	9,175	11,548	9,080	9,523	7,102	9,857	9,318	9,626
International Fund for Agricultural Development	—	—	1,478	3,290	5,261	6,010	7,300	4,542	4,844	2,967	3,477	2,625
United Nations Development Programme	63,726	28,036	29,357	28,843	27,400	26,912	28,128	27,179	28,358	28,353	28,135	27,114
World Food Programme[1]	15,672	4,650	3,109	5,288	1,226	1,472	670	647	12,813	5,256	16,960	4,030
United Nations Children's Fund	16,487	9,328	12,340	9,328	8,989	8,534	11,251	10,753	14,795	14,145	13,201	9,285
United Nations High Commission for Refugees	20,072	13,035	9,826	9,721	5,510	10,050	22,583	18,145	18,248	22,532	20,901	19,495
United Nations Fund for Population Activities	8,654	3,738	3,775	4,132	3,999	4,249	6,027	5,824	6,165	6,076	5,951	3,000
United Nations Environment Programme	1,338	1,108	1,007	935	1,111	1,062	1,005	1,294	1,233	1,447	3,246	3,000

[1] Contributions to the World Food Programme include subscription payments, commodity purchase and, from 1987, food aid. Prior to 1987 the food aid channelled through WFP could not be distinguished from other food aid, and therefore is not included in this table.

United Kingdom contributions to multilateral agencies 1979-90 in cash terms

£ thousands

Organisations	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
International Labour Organisation	2,181	2,800	1,904	2,963	3,749	4,059	4,668	3,918	3,813	4,218	5,574	5,832
Food and Agriculture Organisation	2,482	3,217	3,616	5,592	6,195	8,153	6,779	7,358	5,760	8,518	8,611	9,626
International Fund for Agricultural Development	—	—	881	2,110	3,552	4,243	5,450	3,309	3,280	2,564	3,213	2,625
United Nations Development Programme	28,533	15,000	17,500	18,500	18,500	19,000	21,000	21,000	23,000	24,500	26,001	27,114
World Food Programme[1]	7,017	2,488	1,853	3,392	828	1,039	500	500	10,392	4,542	15,674	4,030
United Nations Children's Fund	7,382	4,991	7,356	5,983	6,069	6,025	8,400	8,308	12,000	12,223	12,200	9,285
United Nations High Commission for Refugees	8,987	6,974	5,857	6,235	3,720	7,095	16,860	14,020	14,800	19,470	19,316	19,495
United Nations Fund for Population Activities	3,875	2,000	2,250	2,650	2,700	3,000	4,500	4,500	5,000	5,250	5,500	3,000
United Nations Environment Programme	599	593	600	600	750	750	750	1,000	1,000	1,250	3,000	3,000

[1] Contributions to the World Food Programme include subscription payments, commodity purchase and, from 1987, food aid. Prior to 1987 the food aid channelled through WFP could not be distinguished from other food aid, and therefore is not included in this table.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

East Timor

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government in response to its national inquiry team report into the Dili massacre in East Timor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Indonesians have been informed of the contents of our statement of 28 January, in which we noted the conclusions of the commission of inquiry and President Soeharto's prompt responses. We expressed support for the recommendation that all those thought to have broken the law should face legal proceedings and urged the Indonesian authorities to investigate thoroughly the responsibility of members of armed forces and see that those found responsible would be punished. We remain concerned about a number of other issues and have urged the Indonesians to take the necessary action both to investigate the fate of those missing and put in place policies designed to ensure that abuses of human rights in East Timor cease.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the human rights situation in East Timor.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 20 January 1992]:* On 28 January we issued a statement in which we noted the conclusions of the commission of inquiry and President Soeharto's prompt response. We expressed support for the recommendation that all those thought to have broken the law should face legal proceedings and urged the Indonesian authorities to investigate thoroughly the responsibility of members of armed forces and see that those found responsible would be punished. We remain concerned about a number of other issues and have urged the Indonesians to take the necessary action both to investigate the fate of those missing and put in place policies designed to ensure that abuses of human rights in East Timor cease.

India

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people applied for places on the Indian FCO scholarship programme in 1991-92 and 1992-93; how many have been awarded places; and whether he has plans to extend the scheme.

Mr. Garel-Jones: A total of 152 FCO scholarships—39 new awards, 113 continuing awards—were made to Indian students in 1991-92. For 1992-93 the figure is 189—56 new awards and 133 continuing awards.

Figures for the total number of applicants for FCO scholarships are not available since a large proportion of FCO scholarships are jointly funded with United Kingdom academic institutions to whom all applicants apply direct; and a large number of FCO scholarships are made from a pool of candidates applying for awards under other official, non-FCO, award schemes.

There are no plans to increase the current provision of resources for FCO scholarships for Indian students, which, at £1,163,000 for 1991-92, already represents nearly 6 per cent. of the global budget of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office scholarships and awards scheme.

Human Rights

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts his Department has had with the Helsinki citizens assembly, based in Prague, established in 1990 to monitor progress in the 1975 Helsinki human rights accords.

Mr. Garel-Jones: A United Kingdom representative of the Helsinki citizens assembly for peace and democracy met FCO officials for the first time on 6 November 1990, to discuss attendance at the CSCE Paris sumit later that month. The representative is regularly sent information on CSCE matters and is invited, together with others interested in the CSCE process, to briefing meetings in the FCO.

Sellafield

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the testimony by Paul Leventhal, president of the Nuclear Control Institute before the Sub-Committee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations held on 14 January on plutonium from the thermal oxide reprocessing plant (THORP) at Sellafield.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Yes. A copy has been ordered and will be added to the FCO departmental library.

Thaira Parveen

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a decision is to be taken on the application by Thaira Parveen (Ref. G 321282; HUL/292/91) to enter the United Kingdom; whether a recommendation has been sent to the post in Islamabad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: In accordance with the guidelines on the handling of representations by Members of Parliament in immigration cases, issued to Members on 14 December 1988, I have referred the question to the correspondence unit of the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The hon. Member will receive a reply from the unit very soon.

Gulfraz Khan

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Gulfraz Khan of Bradford applied to the post in Islamabad for a replacement of his British passport lost while travelling in Pakistan; when the post asked the Liverpool passport office for verification details; when his passport was handed into the post in Karachi; whether a new passport has been collected by Gulfraz Khan; and why no temporary travel document was issued to Gulfraz Khan to enable him to return to school in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[holding answer 16 January 1992]:* An application for a replacement passport was made to the British high commission at Islamabad on behalf of Gulfraz Khan on 27 October 1991. Liverpool passport office was asked for verification of details of his lost passport on 28 October 1991. The British deputy high commissioner at Karachi advised Islamabad on 4 November 1991 that Gulfraz Khan's lost passport had been recovered, and arranged the same day for its dispatch to Islamabad by safe means. Mrs. Samina Akhtar, Gulfraz Khan's mother, collected his new passport from the high commission on 16 January. At no time did the family request the issue of emergency passport facilities to enable Gulfraz Khan to return to school in this country.

DEFENCE

Contaminated Land

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with contractors or consultants on the subject of remediation of contaminated land forming part of the defence estate at the Shoeburyness ranges.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It has not been necessary to seek advice on remediation techniques for contaminated land in connection with the Shoeburyness ranges. Consequently no discussions have been held with contractors or consultants on this subject.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department had during 1991 with contractors or consultants on the subject of remediation of contaminated land forming part of the defence estate at the Atomic Weapons Establishments at Aldermaston, Burghfield and Llanishen.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The AWE maintains regular contacts with land remediation contractors and consultants. Specifically, discussions took place during 1991 with a specialist contractor concerning pre-project planning of remedial work around an on-site sewage facility.

Royal Dockyards

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the royal dockyards at Devonport and Rosyth.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Studies are in progress to review the future infrastructure and arrangements for the refitting and repair of the Royal Navy's ships and submarines.

Housing

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy to monitor the success of service personnel in finding housing after leaving the armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence is examining a range of options for improving housing opportunities for service personnel, with the aim of easing any difficulties service personnel may experience in finding housing at the end of their service career. It is not possible, however, to monitor effectively the housing circumstances of personnel once they have left the Services.

Sleeping Accommodation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 13 January, *Official Report*, column *514*, what information he is able to provide about unused sleeping accommodation in the control of his Department in Greater London.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 31 December 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, 596 Ministry of Defence-owned houses and flats within the Greater London boundary were vacant. The majority of these properties were either already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly or were undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation. The remainder will be required for regiments being re-deployed from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and for personnel returning from overseas as part of the drawdown. In addition, 48 dwellings were in the process of being sold.

The Ministry of Defence is also in the process of disposing of its interest in three sites—Furse house in Kensington and Chelsea, RAF Chessington and east camp, RAF Hendon—which could be used for accommodation purposes.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government are willing to consider claims for compensation from nuclear test participants where any evidence of exposure to radiation can be adduced.

In the absence of recorded levels of exposure, it is only through the statistical studies of the National Radiological Protection Board that it can be determined whether causal links with cancers and leukaemias exist. Its report, published in 1988, demonstrated that no causal link had been found. The National Radiological Protection Board are currently working on a further report which is expected to be complete by mid-1992.

Vehicles (UK Content)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requirements his Department places on non-United Kingdom bidders for contracts for a replacement vehicle for its existing Land Rover fleet to provide undertakings on the United Kingdom content in the vehicles that they are proposing to supply.

Mr. Alan Clark: International agreements on open competition for non-warlike stores preclude the placing of such requirements.

Military Equipment Fairs (Baghdad)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records his Department keeps of British companies that have attended arms and military equipment fairs held in Baghdad.

Mr. Alan Clark: None. My Department keeps such records only when attendance has been sponsored by Her Majesty's Government.

Military Equipment Sales

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the value of sales of military equipment by United Kingdom companies in each year since 1979-80 *(a)* within the United Kingdom, *(b)* to other EC countries and *(c) to non-EC countries, in (i) cash and (ii) 1992 prices.*

Mr. Alan Clark: To answer the question precisely as asked would involve disproportionate cost. I will, however, be happy to write to the hon. Member on this subject.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment, South Derbyshire

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in south Derbyshire were employed in *(a)* 1983, *(b)* 1987, *(c)* 1991 and *(d)* at present, including the self-employed; and what is the rate of change of employment over the same period.

Mr. Jackson: The latest available local area data for the self-employed come from the population censuses for April 1981.

Information about employees in employment in parliamentary constituencies is from the periodic censuses of employment. No census was taken in 1983 and 1989 is the latest date for which figures are available. The numbers of employees in employment in South Derbyshire are shown in the table:

September of each year	*Number of employees*	*Percentage increase since 1984*
1984	18,800	
1987	19,600	+4·3
1989	20,500	+9·4

Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to review the six bed space rule for bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Mr. Key: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) on 11 December 1991, *Official Report*, column *431*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Balligan House

12. **Mr. Kilfedder:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make it his policy to keep open Balligan house for the mentally handicapped.

Mr. Brooke: This is primarily a matter for the Eastern health and social services board and the hon. Gentleman will be aware from his recent correspondence with the chairman of the board that it is currently reviewing the residential services for people with a mental handicap in North Down and Ards. I am sure that he will agree therefore that it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this stage.

Prison Security

12. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will introduce a bill similar to the Prison Security Bill to apply to Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Special Needs Education

13. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children in the Province have been statemented; to what extent the subsequent arrangements made for their education have fulfilled the requirements in the statements; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: At Janaury 1991, a total of 5,997 children in Northern Ireland had statements of special educational needs. I am not aware of any general dissatisfaction about the way in which the requirements of statements are being fulfilled.

Political Initiatives

15. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he now has any plans for further political initiatives in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the joint statement issued on Monday 27 January by the Government and the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office.

Employment

16. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on current levels of employment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: At September 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 523,350 employees in employment. This represents an increase of almost 22,000 over the past five years.

Constitutional Talks

17. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his latest talks with the constitutional parties in the Province.

18. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his recent talks with party leaders in Northern Ireland.

24. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his plans for future political progress in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friends and the hon. Member to the joint statement issued on Monday 27 January by the Government and the leaders of the four main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland, copies of which have been placed in the Vote Office.

Home Ownership

19. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the level of home ownership in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: By the end of May 1991 the total number of owner-occupied properties was 350,000 or almost 65 per cent. of the total housing stock.

Crime

20. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the use of video cameras to combat crime in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Video cameras have a wide range of useful applications in combating crime in Northern Ireland, for example, in preventing and detecting crime in commercial premises and as an aid to perimeter security at industrial, commercial and Government premises.

Investment

21. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the latest figures of inward investment to Northern Ireland both from inside the rest of the United Kingdom and from outside.

Mr. Needham: The total forecast investment resulting from projects for which selective financial assistance was offered between April 1988 and April 1991 is £230 million. Of this, approximately £219 million relates to projects involving companies based outside the United Kingdom.

Terrorism

22. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of planned terrorist incidents detected in advance.

Dr. Mawhinney: Increasingly effective proactive work by the security forces is undoubtedly deterring or preventing substantial numbers of terrorist attacks. The Chief Constable of the RUC has stated that at least four out of five major anticipated terrorist outrages are being prevented.

Security

23. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I regret to report that since I last answered a similar question on 12 December there have been 20 deaths as a result of terrorist violence in Northern Ireland. All the dead were civilians.

The Government will remain steadfast in its commitment to bring terrorism to an end. The security forces will continue to pursue terrorists and bring them to justice. Last year, some 400 persons were charged with terrorist related offences, including some 120 with murder or attempted murder.

Oil and Gas Reserves

25. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement outlining the findings of explorations to date in Northern Ireland for oil and gas reserves.

Mr. Needham: Since 1964, nine exploration licences have been granted by the Department of Economic Development and seven exploratory wells have been drilled. Four of those wells had gas shows, but these were not sufficient quantities for commercial exploitation.

Belfast City Centre

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much private and public sector funding has been made available to date to regenerate Belfast city centre.

Mr. Needham: Current and programmed private sector investment in Belfast city centre totals £290 million. This comes on top of the £320 million invested over the last six years. For their part, the Government have contributed to the regeneration both through urban development grant and various environmental improvement schemes.

Roads

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the major capital expenditure on roads provision in *(a)* Down, *(b)* Newry and Mourne and *(c)* Banbridge district council areas in each year since 1 April 1981; and what breakdown he has on spending on roads provision in each electoral ward.

Mr. Needham: Capital expenditure on major road schemes was as follows:

£'000

	District council		
	Down	Newry and Mourne	Banbridge
1981-82	29	427	75
1982-83	58	493	90
1983-84	17	1,365	125
1984-85	4	1,320	28
1985-86	Nil	839	282
1986-87	Nil	1,198	508
1987-88	Nil	1,466	360
1988-89	Nil	590	1,246
1989-90	210	1,120	91
1990-91	80	516	64

Expenditure details are not maintained for electoral wards.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been allocated to roads expenditure in the Downpatrick and Craigavon roads divisions from 1 April 1992 to 31 March 1993; and how this amount is spent.

Mr. Needham: Details of the financial allocations to roads service divisions have not yet been finalised, but it is expected that Downpatrick and Craigavon divisions will receive approximately £16·5 million and £14·5 million respectively.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of bovine spongiform encelphalopathy were confirmed in each county in Northern Ireland in each year since 1986.

Mr. Hanley: There were no cases of BSE in Northern Ireland in 1986 or 1987. The table shows the numbers by county to 31 December 1991.

County	Year confirmed			
	1988	1989	1990	1991
Antrim	1	10	31	56
Armagh	0	1	8	11
Down	1	10	22	27
Fermanagh	1	1	10	19
Londonderry	0	4	8	26
Tyrone	0	4	21	31
TOTAL	3	30	100	170

There are 1,533,266 cattle in Northern Ireland.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assistance he will give to renewable energy projects in Northern Ireland in 1992; and when he intends to inaugurate a 20 per cent. non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Needham: In 1992-93 an estimated £300,000 assistance will be provided for collaborative renewable energy projects in Northern Ireland. Additional assistance will be available to industrial and commercial organisations under the energy efficiency survey scheme. I hope to announce arrangements for a non-fossil fuel obligation in Northern Ireland in April.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Human Rights (Exports)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to monitor the effectiveness of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989 in preventing the export from the United Kingdom of equipment directly used in the violation of human rights.

Mr. Sainsbury: The effectiveness of the Export of Goods (Control) Order is constantly being monitored and the order is amended when necessary. The 1989 order was amended eight times in two years to meet changing needs in export controls and was replaced recently by the 1991 order which contained further amendments.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take further action to establish effective channels to receive information from non-governmental organisations on human rights aspects of the export of military, security and police equipment.

Mr. Sainsbury: My export control organisation receives expert advice from other Government Departments on all export licence applications for licensable military security and police equipment. This advice takes into account the human rights record of the country of ultimate destination. For reasons of commercial confidentiality it has been the practice of successive Governments not to divulge details of individual export licence applications, although general statistics of export licence activity is published. However, I welcome any firm evidence about human rights violations which helps to inform our export licensing decisions.

Shipbuilding Intervention Fund

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will consult with the Shipbuilding and Shiprepairers Association over the clawback provision of the shipbuilding intervention fund.

Mr. Leigh: I hope to discuss this and other matters with the Shipbuilders and Shiprepairers Association shortly.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to revise the clawback provision governing the granting of shipbuilding intervention funding.

Mr. Leigh: None at present.

Firework Accidents

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to publish the results of the 1990 joint survey undertaken by 42 local authorities and his Department to assess accurately the level of firework accidents nationally; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The results relating to hospital cases reported in the joint survey undertaken by 42 local authorities in 1990 were broadly comparable to the hospital accident figures published by the Department in 1991. A report highlighting these findings will be published in March this year.

The consumer safety unit is currently awaiting a response from the local authority officials to take forward joint discussions on the overall presentation of future firework accident data.

ECGD

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the most recent trading accounts of the Export Credits Guarantee Department have been published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I am pleased to announce that the Comptroller and Auditor General today presented ECGD's trading accounts for the financial year 1990-91 to Parliament together with his certificate and report thereon. The ECGD's annual report for the financial year 1990-91, which incorporates the trading accounts, is also published today and I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

Publicity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he is yet in a position to provide a firm estimate of his Department's spending on publicity and advertising in the current financial year.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 28 January 1992]:* I estimate that expenditure from the Department's central publicity budget, which includes DTI's main advertising activities, will be of the order of £11 million this year.

SCOTLAND

Glasgow Royal Infirmary

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to give capital approval for the building of the new maternity unit at Glasgow royal infirmary.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* My right hon. Friend approved on 27 December 1991 the principle of building a new maternity unit at Glasgow royal infirmary at a cost of £15·4 million. It is for Greater Glasgow health board to follow the normal procedures in taking this project forward to completion.

Stobhill Maternity Unit

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of his letter to Greater Glasgow health board announcing approval of the closure of Stobhill maternity unit and asking for a further review of the maternity services in Glasgow.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 22 January 1992]:* It is not normal practice to make such correspondence available and I do not consider it appropriate to do so in this case.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Certificate of Education

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the current recruitment levels as a percentage of Government targets, for students to postgraduate certificate in education courses in *(a)* physics, *(b)* chemistry, *(c)* technology and *(d)* mathematics.

Mr. Fallon: The Government do not give separate target intakes to the higher education funding councils for postgraduate and undergraduate teacher training courses or for individual science subjects. In 1991, recruitment to secondary undergraduate and postgraduate initial teacher training courses in science, design and technology, and mathematics, as a percentage of the planned intakes for those subjects, was as follows:

	Per cent.
Science	112
Design and technology	119
Mathematics	90

Polytechnics (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what quality safeguards are required for competitive tendering within polytechnics;

(2) what guidelines are available to polytechnics concerning the procedure for competitive tendering.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The provisions of part I of the Local Government Act (1988), which concern competitive tendering, do not apply to polytechnics, which are independent institutions. Individual polytechnics are, therefore, responsible for determining quality criteria appropriate to each contract. In order to secure the best value for money, the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) requires institutions to let contracts for publicly-funded capital projects through competitive tendering procedures.

The costs of any redundancies which may result from competitive tendering fall to be met by the appropriate polytechnic. In certain circumstances, the costs may be eligible for reimbursement by the PCFC under its restructuring scheme.

Further Education (Special Needs)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give general guidance to further education college boards of management about the provision of education to those with special educational needs.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill, in accordance with the commitment given by my noble Friends on 14 January, *Official Report, House of Lords*, Vol. 534, columns 167 and 211, my right hon. and learned Friend will issue guidance to the further education funding councils on the application of the phrase "disproportionate expenditure" in clause 2 of the Bill and on the importance of ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place for assessing the educational needs of students with learning difficulties. It will be for the councils to take this into account in determining the arrangements for funding the colleges.

Schools (Selection)

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the effects of the Greenwich judgment on the selection of schools.

Mr. Fallon *[pursuant to the answer* 28 January 1992]: My right hon. and learned Friend has now reviewed the evidence submitted by the London Boroughs Association

and individual local education authorities about the effects of the Greenwich judgment on school admissions in 1991. That evidence does not suggest that authorities have faced sufficiently serious practical problems to justify a change in the law to allow authorities' previous practice of giving priority in school admissions to those who live within their areas. My right hon. and learned Friend does not therefore propose to pursue such a change in the law.

The needs of local authorities to incur capital expenditure in order to discharge their responsibility to ensure that sufficient school places are available to meet the needs of their own residents will, however, continue to be recognised in the allocation of borrowing authority for such expenditure.

We will be writing to those who submitted evidence, and to the local authority associations, to inform them of my right hon. and learned Friend's decision.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Land (Planning Applications)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *445*, how many planning applications the Ministry *(a)* considered and *(b)* objected to in each county in (i) 1981 and (ii) 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: This information is not available by county.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of planning applications he was consulted on in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales for each grade of agricultural land for each year since 1980.

Mr. Gummer: As planning applications can relate to a mixture of grades of agricultural land the records do not show the number of consultations by grade.

Information on the total number of consultations in England and Wales for each year since 1980 is as follows:

	Number
1980	1,717
1981	1,893
1982	1,479
1983	1,315
1984	1,583
1985	1,640
1986	2,037
1987	1,618
1988	1,490
1989	1,296
1990	1,439

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the rates that are payable for the storage and disposal of BSE carcases; to whom such payments are made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: This information is commercial-in-confidence and cannot therefore be disclosed.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food further to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *289*, if he will set out the conditions covering the storage of BSE confirmed carcases in refrigerated lorries; whether his Ministry has to be notified of every location where such carcases are stored; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: There are six sites where refrigerated containers are held while loads are being assembled. The State Veterinary Service supervises the facilities to ensure that they are used only for storing BSE carcases; lockable; bird, rodent and leak proof; capable of being thoroughly cleansed and disinfected.

All carcases are transported under licence to specified destinations. The licence includes details of identification marks permitting cross referencing at holding premises.

Irradiation

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research projects his Ministry is *(a)* carrying out or *(b)* funding into the effect of food irradiation on (i) pesticide residues, (ii) food additives and (iii) packaging; and if he will give in each case the name of the research establishment, duration of project and cost of project.

Mr. Gummer: The following projects are being carried out or funded by my Ministry.

Effects of irradiation on pesticide residues
Research Establishment: MAFF Food Science Laboratory (Norwich)
Duration: 3 years
Cost: £137,000

Experimental determination of radiation doses absorbed in food contact materials
Research Establishment: AEA Technology, Harwell
Duration: 9 months
Cost: £15,200

My Ministry also funded a project on "A comparison of the effects of gamma and electron beam irradiation on additives present in food contact polymers" at Sheffield university over three years to September 1991 at a cost of £36,000. Other projects on irradiation of packaging material carried out between 1984 and 1988 are described in Food Surveillance Paper No. 26, "Migration of Substances from Food Contact Materials into Food" (HMSO, 1989). The results of all this research have been or will be published in the scientific literature.

Clenbuterol

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will announce the results of the further tests for clenbuterol undertaken on meat imported into the United Kingdom from the Irish Republic.

Mr. Maclean: A total of 60 further samples of liver, kidney, muscle and heart taken from farm animals originating from the Irish Republic during the period 1 September—31 December 1991 have been examined for the presence of clenbuterol residues. One bovine sample was found to contain detectable residues of clenbuterol, as follows:

Date of import	Tissue	Screening Test	Confirmatory Test
12 October 1991	Kidney	1·8 u/kg	2·9 u/kg

The screening and confirmatory tests were carried out at the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland (DANI) Veterinary Science Laboratory at Belfast. A further test on the single positive sample was carried out at the MAFF Food Science Laboratory at Norwich, which confirmed DANI's results.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Hague: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Agriculture Council held on 27 to 28 January.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting of the Council together with the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry).

The Presidency presented a working document, cast in very broad terms, seeking to identify areas of agreement on the reform of the common agricultural policy in order to take the discussions forward. I made it clear that it would not be possible for the United Kingdom nor, I believed for any member state, to take a definitive view on CAP reform until they knew the outcome of the GATT negotiations. I also expressed doubts whether the working document in practice took matters any further forward. Discussions will now resume at the next meeting of the Council on 10 to 11 February.

The Council also discussed the position on GATT. I argued that the Community's response to the Dunkel paper on GATT should be based on the expectation of securing eventual agreement. The Community should concentrate on ensuring the coherence of the proposals in the three main areas of reductions in domestic support, market access and export subsidies, and explore the difficulties that the text poses because of the proposed commitments on volume reductions in subsidised exports and the absence of proposals for charges on certain cereal derivatives. I suggested that the Commission should pay much less attention to the possibility of securing a wider "green box" of permitted subsidies. These views received considerable support. The Commissioner said he would take member states' views into account in the continuing discussions in Geneva.

The Council agreed in principle on a measure specifying the rules for meat products that will apply in the single market. This is a useful step forward.

The French Minister questioned how the Commission intended responding to the proposal in the draft GATT text that import controls on bananas should be converted into a tariff. I emphasised the importance of this question for certain ACP banana producers with which the United Kingdom has traditional links. The Commission said they were examining the position.

HEALTH

Bio Products Laboratory

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is the policy of the West Midlands regional transfusion centre to purchase its supply of blood products from the Bio Products Laboratory rather than subject to tender to commercial suppliers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The hospitals which use blood products are free to choose between commercial products or the Bio Products Laboratory (BPL) products. The West Midland blood transfusion centre supplies plasma to the BPL and acts as distributor of its products to those hospitals which wish to use them. Those hospitals which prefer commercial products can readily obtain them through the usual pharmaceutical distribution channels.

Food Hygiene

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had about the practice of certain local authorities in interpreting the Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990 and the Food Safety Act 1990 to the detriment of social functions which take place in village halls, and where food is prepared in people's homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A number of representations have been received. The Food Safety Act 1990 is intended to enforce a high standard of food safety. There is no reason why volunteers should not continue to provide food for sale at village hall functions.

Publications

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist for the circulation among regional and district health authorities of relevant publications emanating from bodies such as the British Medical Association.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department has no standard arrangements for distributing such documents within the NHS, but we consider proposals on their merits if the BMA, or a similar organisation, suggests that we circulate a document jointly.

Hydatidosis

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have *(a)* died and *(b)* undergone surgery from hydatidosis in the years 1989, 1990 and 1991; and what was the estimated cost to the national health service of hydatidosis for each of these years.

Mr. Dorrell: Notifications to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys giving hydatid disease as the cause of death were as follows:

	Number
1989	3
1990	5
1991[1]	3

[1] To September.

The number of instances of surgery for hydatid disease is not available, as it is not possible to disaggregate the cost of this treatment from other surgical procedures.

Extra-contractual Referrals

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will specify for each district health authority the number of extra-contractual referral cases that have been *(a)* applied for, *(b)* accepted and *(c)* rejected for the first 10 months of 1991-92.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

GP Fundholding

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure to date on the introduction of general practitioner fundholding, excluding money transferred to fundholders to purchase health care.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is available on payments of the preparatory and management allowances which is provided in the table. These payments have been used by practices to improve and expand their management systems, which will be of benefit to patients. Information on payments made to both potential and existing fundholders in respect of computer systems is not separately identifiable.

GP fundholding preparatory and management allowances estimated expenditure

1990-91	[1] *1991-92*	*England total*
4,372,387	8,032,000	12,404,387

[1] April-November. Latest available figures are given.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health of the total allocation to general practitioner fundholders for 1991-92 what is the amount allocated for drug prescribing; and what is the amount allocated for purchasing other health care services.

Mr. Dorrell: The total allocation in England, to the nearest million pounds was £401 million. This comprised £208 million for hospital services, £162 million for drug prescribing and £31 million for staff costs. GP fundholders may vire between these three elements of the fund in order to provide the care which best meets the needs of their patients.

Capital Charges

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the role of capital charges in the 1992-93 financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: The capital charging system, introduced on 1 April 1991, is now a firm part of the NHS financial regime. It will continue to operate in 1992-93 and in future years. It ensures that the full costs of capital in the NHS are taken into account when setting contract prices and making decisions on the use of assets.

Risk Money Reserves

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the amount of money held by each regional health authority as a risk money reserve in 1991-92; and how much was held by each regional health authority in 1990-91.

Mr. Dorrell: Comprehensive information on the amount of money set aside to manage risk is not held centrally.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how *(a)* a health authority, *(b)* a NHS trust and *(c)* a fundholding general practitioner apply for an allocation from regional health authority's risk money reserve.

Mr. Dorrell: The procedure for applying for money from regional reserves is for individual regional health authorities to determine.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the risk factors for which regional health authorities are holding risk money reserves.

Mr. Dorrell: The reserves are held to provide in-year flexibility in line with sensible financial practice.

Care Homes

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991 will come into force; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We intend to bring the Registered Homes (Amendment) Act 1991 into force later this year once the necessary regulations have been made and sufficient time allowed for applications for registration to be lodged.

Operations Statistics

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the targets set by his Department in 1986 for the number of heart bypass, cataract and hip replacement operations to be done *(a)* in each regional health authority in 1990 and *(b)* in total in 1990; and what was the actual number of each type of operation in each regional health authority and in total carried out in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 23 January 1992]:* In 1986 national targets were set for numbers of operations per million population. Information on the targets at national level is in the table.

Data available for 1990-91 are not a reliable indication of whether targets have been met on a regional basis as they do not accurately reflect cross boundary flows.

	Targets per million population	*Target number of operations in 1990-91 based on 1990 population*	*Operations performed 1990-91*
Coronary artery by-pass graft (CABGs)	300	14,290	12,240
Cataract operation	1500	71,520	94,739
Hip replacement	1,050	50,060	44,477

Special Health Authorities

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's annual expenditure on special health authorities.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 14 January 1992]:* Resources made available to special health authorities

during 1990-91 and included in the Department's appropriation account for that year amounted to some £623 million.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the expenditure by his Department on the general practitioner fundholding scheme.

Mr. Dorrell *[pursuant to his answer 24 January 1992, Official Report, column 398]:* I regret that an incorrect figure was given for the total allocated to GP fundholders to purchase health care. GP fundholders are managing a total budget of £401,400,000 in 1991-92.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the loss or gain in revenue if national insurance started *(a)* at £100 per week for all wage earners, *(b)* at £120 per week and *(c)* if national insurance contribution was set at 10 per cent. and collected as an addition to income tax with no cut-off point.

Mr. Jack: The loss or gain in revenue is set out in the table:

(£ billion)

Employee contribution rate	*First year*			*Full year*		
	Employee[1]	*Employer*[1]	*Total*	*Employee*[1]	*Employer*[2]	*Total*
(a) Lower earnings limit—£100						
9 per cent.	−1·0	−1·1	−2·1	−1·1	−1·3	−2·4
10 per cent.	+0·4	−1·1	−0·7	+0·5	−1·3	−0·8
(b) Lower earnings limit—£120						
9 per cent.	−2·3	−1·7	−4·0	−2·6	−1·9	−4·5
10 per cent.	−0·9	−1·7	−2·6	−1·1	−1·9	−3·0

[1] Employee contributions—assumes that contributions are deducted at 2 per cent. on earnings up to the lower earnings limit and that there is no upper earnings limit.
[2] Employer contributions—assumes that the existing structure of rates and earnings brackets applies above the appropriate lower earnings limit.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the weekly cost would be to someone on one and a half times male average earnings of the abolition of the national insurance upper earnings limit.

Mr. Jack: Someone earning £490 a week, which is about one and a half times average male earnings, would pay an extra £9 per week in national insurance contributions in 1991-92 if the upper earnings limit was abolished.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the estimated annual cost to employers of abolishing the lower earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions.

Mr. Jack: If the lower earnings limit were abolished in respect of just the employees' share of contributions, the additional cost for employers would be in administration. There are no readily available estimates of these costs. The businesses which would be affected most are likely to be those whose workforce is made up of a large proportion of, or wholly, part-time employees; for example hotels, newsagent and cleaning contractors. These types of employers would have to set up or expand their existing systems of collecting, recording and subsequently paying over contributions. Moreover, there would be pressure on employers to increase pay, so that the employee's net earnings remained the same once they had paid their contributions.

However, if the employers' lower earnings limit were also abolished, we estimate that it would cost business about £175 million a year in extra national insurance contributions.

Attendance Allowances

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for *(a)* attendance allowance and *(b)* night attendance allowance have been made in respect of constituents in Stoke-on-Trent, North, in each of the last two years and including 1991-92 to date; and if he will give in respect of day and night allowances (1) the number of successful applicants, (2) the number of refusals, (3) the number of appeals and (4) the number of outstanding appeals.

Mr. Scott: I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that the information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer of 23 January, *Official Report*, column *98*, if he will give the number of *(a)* pensioners, *(b)* economically inactive single adults and *(c)* economically inactive single adults with dependants, in receipt of income support in respect of mortgage interest in each standard region and nationally, in each year since 1980.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The tables relate to 1989 and 1990, the latest years for which figures are readily available:

	Pensioners	*Single without dependants*	*Single with dependants*
1989			
North Eastern	9,000	14,000	9,000
London North	13,000	17,000	7,000
South Western	7,000	7,000	7,000
Wales	6,000	8,000	5,000
Midlands	12,000	15,000	9,000
North Western	11,000	15,000	12,000
Scotland	4,000	6,000	3,000
London South	11,000	13,000	8,000
Total	73,000	95,000	59,000

	Pensioners	Single without dependants	Single with dependants
1990			
North Eastern	11,000	14,000	9,000
London North	15,000	19,000	12,000
South Western	8,000	9,000	12,000
Wales	9,000	9,000	4,000
Midlands	14,000	16,000	11,000
North Western	11,000	15,000	11,000
Scotland	4,000	6,000	3,000
London South	14,000	18,000	13,000
Total	86,000	107,000	68,000

Notes:
1. The figures for pensioners are for all pensioners whether or not they have part time earnings.
2. The figures for single adults do not include part-time earnings.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand; for this reason the sum of individual entries does not always equal the total given.

Source:
Annual Statistical Enquiries 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total value of payments in respect of income support for mortgage interest in each standard region and nationally in 1989 and 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table:

Region	Mortgage interest 1989	Mortgage interest 1990
North Eastern	42	54
London North	78	129
South Western	33	52
Wales	22	31
Midlands	45	69
North Western	50	65
Scotland	19	25
London South	63	129
Great Britain	353	554

Notes:
1. Figures represent amounts added in the income support assessment, not actual amounts paid.
2. The figures are in pounds rounded to millions.
3. Due to rounding the sum of the individual amounts for each region does not equal the total for Great Britain for 1989.

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiries 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are estimated to be the administration costs of paying mortgage interest payments for home owners on income support directly to the mortgage lenders.

Miss Widdecombe: The estimated costs connected with the Social Security (Mortgage Interest Payments) Bill are set out in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum to the Bill which was introduced on 23 January.

Crisis Loans

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many crisis loans were awarded from the social fund to claimants who were waiting for their first benefit payment in each of the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Annual totals of number of crisis loans paid to people awaiting initial payment of a benefit are set out in the table.

Number of crisis loans awarded to align with benefit payments

1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
143,800	191,000	207,200

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications were made to the social fund in each of the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 for fares to hospital; and how many of these were awarded.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will allocate any further money to the social fund budget.

Mr. Scott: I am pleased to announce that a further £6·2 million is to be allocated to the gross social fund budget by the end of this month. With the increases of £40 million made in August and £3 million in November, this takes the total gross social fund discretionary budget in 1991-92 to £277 million. As a result of this increase in the gross budget my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has approved changes in two Benefits Agency targets for 1991-92. The revised targets are:

—to live within a gross budget of £277 million for loans and grants; and

—to recover £143 million in loan repayments.

Local Offices, Heywood and Middleton

189. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claim each benefit payable *(a)* at each of the Heywood and Middleton social security offices and *(b)* in the United Kingdom.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of benefits in Great Britain is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with such information as is available and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office. Information about Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 31 January 1992

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Gulf War

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further assistance is envisaged for the Kurds and Shias, and Iraqi citizens who have been materially affected by the Gulf war.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 20 January at column *15*.

Sipho Mbeje

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made any representations to the Zambian Government about human rights abuses in relation to Sipho Mbeje; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the Zambian authorities are detaining Mr. Mbeje at Lusaka central prison pending his deportation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is pursuing the question of where he may obtain asylum.

Meanwhile our high commission in Lusaka raised Mr. Mbeje's case on 9 December with the UNHCR, who advised that there was no immediate cause for concern about his condition. The high commission will continue to monitor his case.

ENVIRONMENT

Richmond Borough Council

Mr. Jessel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out figures for the last five financial years including the current year, and the projected figures for next year for Government grant to the Richmond upon Thames borough council both on capital and current account.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

Government grants to Richmond-on-Thames borough council

	Revenue £ million	*Capital £ million*
1987-88	[1]24·82	0·21
1988-89	[1]21·45	n.a.
1989-90	[1]22·87	0·84

Projected figures

	Revenue £ million	*Capital £ million*
[2]1990-91	[3]63·82	1·41
1991-92	[4]91·40	[5]0·45
1992-93	[6]91·90	n.a.

[1] Revenue grants comprise rate support grant, relevant specific and supplementary grants taken to revenue, transport supplementary grant taken to revenue and rate rebate grants.

[2] The new local government finance system was introduced in 1990, and figures for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are not comparable for those before 1990.

[3] Comprises revenue support grant after safety net, national non-domestic rate entitlement, specific grants within AEF, community charge benefit and transitional relief grant.

[4] Comprises revenue support grant, national non-domestic rate entitlement, specific grants within AEF, community charge benefit, community charge reduction scheme grant and community charges (general reduction) grant.

[5] Local authority forecast.

[6] Comprises revenue support grant (which in 1992-93 includes community charge grant) and national non-domestic rate entitlements only. No estimates are available for remaining grants.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment the National Rivers Authority has undertaken of the possible pollution dangers from the presence of Forest Moor naval communications and Menwith Hill station.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that a gas oil spillage from the complex occurred earlier this month causing pollution of a nearby stream. The NRA undertook containment and clean up works to prevent further pollution. Improvement works will be carried out on site to prevent a recurrence. Discharges of sewage effluent from both sites are routinely sampled by the NRA and the results are available to the public.

Diesel Cars

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information is available to him on the environmental and health effects of the diesel-powered car; what evidence, including medical reports and any experimentation, this information is based upon; for how long and by whom any research has been conducted; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the 15th report of the Royal Commisson on environmental pollution: "Emissions from Heavy Duty Diesel Vehicles" (Cm 1631), published in September 1991. Paragraphs 2.26 and following give a useful summary, with references, of the evidence on the environmental and health effects of diesel emissions. In general, this is relevant to emissions from diesel-powered cars as well as heavy vehicles.

Water Pollution

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions diesel oil has entered *(a)* Swinsty reservoir in north Yorkshire or *(b)* the Leeds water supply during the last three years.

Mr. Baldry: I am not aware of any occasion on which diesel oil has entered either the Swinsty reservoir or the Leeds water supply during the last three years.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Long-stay Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of prison inmates in prisons in England and Wales who have served a continuous prison sentence of over 20 years, over 25 years and over 30 years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest available information is given in the table.

Inmates[1] of Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 30 November 1991 who had spent a continuous period of more than 20 years in such establishments under sentence: by time spent under sentence.

Number of prisoners

	Time under sentence			
	Over 20 up to 25 years	*Over 25 up to 30 years*	*Over 30 years*	*Over 20 years*
Received under original sentence	64	14	5	83
Recalled following an earlier release on licence	—	—	[2]1	1

[1] The figures are those recorded centrally and are approximate; detailed checking of individual cases would involve disproportionate cost.
[2] Time served since recall from licence.

Neighbourhood Watch, South Yorkshire

Mr. Patchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes operate in south Yorkshire.

Mr. John Patten: At present there are 1,425 neighbourhood watch schemes in operation in south Yorkshire covering aproximately 75,000 households.

Beef

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the countries from where beef was purchased for consumption in prisons in 1991 and in each case, including the United Kingdom, give the quantity bought and amount spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: During 1990, the quantity of beef purchased for consumption in prisons in England and Wales was approximately:

	£ million	*Tons*
United Kingdom	1·14	675
Eire	0·06	35

Information for year ending 31 December 1991 is not available.

DNA Profiles

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 27 January, *Official Report*, column *403*, if he will state which of the police forces in England and Wales currently comply with guidelines adopted by the Home Office and Metropolitan Police Forensic Science Services on the destruction of DNA profiles of persons excluded from or acquitted of offences; which police forces in England and Wales remove such profiles from their own databases; which do not; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Apart from the Home Office and Metropolitan police forensic science services, I am not aware of any police force in England and Wales which has developed, or is intending to develop, a database to hold DNA profiles.

Sipho Mbeje

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to make a decision on the request made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Lusaka that Sipho Mbeje should be granted an entry visa to come to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mr. Mbeje's application is under consideration and a decision will be reached as soon as possible.

Ecstasy

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many seizures of ecstasy and other similar drugs have been made in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 17 January 1992]:* The number of seizures of MDMA—"Ecstasy"—MDA, amphetamines and LSD for 1990 and 1991 were as shown in the table.

Figures for police seizures in 1991 are incomplete. They represent those so far reported to the Home Office and do not include seizures made towards the end of the year.

United Kingdom

Number of seizures

	1990		*1991*	
	Police	*Customs*	*Police*[1]	*Customs*
MDMA (Ecstasy)	374	25	812	49
MDA	17	0	113	1
Amphetamines	4,489	139	2,183	108
LSD	1,772	87	917	99

[1] Incomplete, some seizures from the second half of 1991 not yet reported.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Management

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list (i) for those Departments with a financial management initiative management system *(a)* the name in each case, *(b)* when it was established and *(c)* the name of the Minister who

has direct supervision of the system; and (ii) those Departments which do not have a financial management initiative management system.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally and the question should be addressed to individual Ministers.

Western Sahara

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Prime Minister whether he intends to discuss the future status of the western Sahara during his forthcoming meeting at the United Nations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

The subject may arise in discussion in the margins of the special meeting of the United Nations Security Council, but there is unlikely to be time for any detailed discussions of regional issues at the meeting itself.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy at the forthcoming special meeting of the United Nations permanent members of the Security Council on proliferation *(a)* to establish agreed criteria for the completion of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, *(b)* to urge President Mitterrand to finalise French membership of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and to halt nuclear testing in the Polynesian islands in the Pacific and *(c)* to establish the basis for the United Kingdom to fulfil its obligations under article VI of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to negotiate nuclear disarmament with other treaty signatory states.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply. The main purpose of today's special meeting of the UN Security Council is to reaffirm the importance of the UN's role in maintaining international peace and security. This may include discussion of arms control agreements. However, we have no plans to raise the issues referred to in the question.

Tax (Wales)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Prime Minister what is the total tax paid by the people of Wales, including to local councils; what is the total expenditure from that taxation in Wales by Government, local councils and all other bodies so financed including the relevant proportion for Wales of any expenditure on a wider basis; and what these figures are per head of the Welsh population.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply. Information on the total tax paid by people in Wales is not available. Information is, for example, not available for capital gains tax. Data is available on income tax payments and the latest information, which relates to 1988-89, is given in table 2.10 of the 1991 issue of Inland Revenue Statistics. Precise figures for receipts from indirect tax payments paid by people in Wales are not available but it is estimated that the Welsh share of United Kingdom taxes collected by HM Customs and Excise in 1990-91 was about £2½ billion. The latest information on community charge and non-domestic rate payments indicates that at 31 March 1991 local authorities had received an estimated £360 million (£125 per head) in community charges for 1990-91 and that payments of non-domestic rates by businesses for 1990-91 were an estimated £430 million (£150 per head) at the same date.

Information on general government expenditure in Wales in 1990-91, other than that incurred for the benefit of the UK as a whole, is given in tables E6a and E6b of appendix E of the statistical supplement to the 1991 Autumn Statement (Cm. 1920).

EMPLOYMENT

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total waiting list of cases for industrial tribunal hearing in the Newcastle upon Tyne office on 1 January; what number and percentage of cases waiting less than six weeks, less than eight weeks, less than 10 weeks, less than 12 weeks, less than 16 weeks, less than 20 weeks and less than 26 weeks; and what the maximum waiting time was at 1 January.

Mr. Forth: I regret that the information on waiting times is not available in precisely the form requested. The figures show those cases in the Newcastle area which have been registered but which had not come to hearing by 29 January 1992.

	Number	*Percentage*
Less than 6 weeks	196	12·9
More than 6 weeks-less than 8 weeks	97	6·4
More than 8 weeks-less than 10 weeks	77	5·1
More than 10 weeks-less than 12 weeks	113	7·4
More than 12 weeks-less than 16 weeks	141	9·3
More than 16 weeks-less than 20 weeks	138	9·1
More than 20 weeks-less than 26 weeks	123	8·1
More than 26 weeks	633	41·7
Total	1,518	

The maximum waiting time was 39 weeks, unless the parties requested a later hearing date.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he has taken or is taking to reduce the waiting times for industrial tribunals in the Newcastle upon Tyne area.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has increased the budget for the industrial tribunals in England and Wales by over £2 million in the current financial year. This has enabled additional administrative staff and tribunal chairmen to be appointed in the Newcastle region, and there has been a substantial increase in the number of tribunal hearings. Measures are also being taken to improve efficiency.

Employee Training

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will introduce a requirement for companies to publish information on their policy on employee training.

Mr. Jackson: The investors in people initiative already requires companies seeking the award to make a public commitment to training and developing their employees.

Labour Costs

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the change in unit labour costs in the United Kingdom since the October 1990 exchange rate mechanism entry, and what are the corresponding figures in Germany, and the average in all the ERM member countries.

Mr. Forth: Between October 1990 and September 1991 unit wage and salary costs in manufacturing in the United Kingdom rose by 4·5 per cent. compared with an increase in Germany over the same period of 7·3 per cent. Data are not available to give the corresponding average in all the ERM member countries.

Self-employment

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the change, in numerical and percentage terms, in the number of self-employed people in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Great Britain between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The information is as follows:

Self-employed
Change between June 1979 and June 1990

	Actual (000's)	*per cent.*
Scotland	74	46
Great Britain	1,380	75

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the percentage of self-employed people in the work forces of member states of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The information is given in the table.

Self-employed as a percentage of the civilian work force

	1989 (mid year) per cent.
Belgium	13·0
Denmark	8·5
Federal Republic of Germany	10·2
France	13·6
Greece	[1] 32·5
Ireland	[1] 18·8
Italy	21·8
Luxembourg	9·7
Netherlands	8·8
Portugal	28·2
Spain	17·9
United Kingdom	[2] 11·6

[1] Figures are for 1988, latest available.
[2] The latest available figure (June 1990) is 11·7 per cent.
Source: OECD Labour Force Statistics 1969 to 1989 except United Kingdom (ED).

Labour Statistics

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of unemployed people in *(a)* the Ipswich travel-to-work area and *(b)* the Ipswich parliamentary constituency at the latest available date; and what were the equivalent figures five and eight years ago, respectively.

Mr. Jackson: The requested information is contained in the following table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library.

Unemployed claimants (not seasonally adjusted)

	Ipswich Travel-to-work area	*Ipswich Parliamentary constituency*
December 1991	7,600	3,712
December 1986	8,345	4,189
December 1983	8,084	4,055

Direct comparisons are affected by the changes in the coverage of the count that have occurred over the period.

Mr. Stephen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people were self-employed in *(a)* Aberdeen, *(b)* Kincardine and Deeside, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the United Kingdom, in each year from 1987 to date.

Mr. Forth: Estimates of the numbers of people who are self-employed are not available for areas smaller than standard regions for the dates specified. The available figures for Scotland and the United Kingdom are as follows:

Self-employed (thousands)

	Scotland	*United Kingdom*
June 1987	194	2,869
June 1988	215	2,998
June 1989	236	3,253
June 1990	234	3,298

NORTHERN IRELAND

Terrorism

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the number of persons killed in Northern Ireland as a result of the security situation since 1988 to the present day distinguishing between *(a)* the RUC, *(b)* the RUCR, *(c)* the Army, *(d)* the UDR, and *(e)* civilians.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is set out in the table:

Deaths in Northern Ireland as a result of the security situation

Year	*RUC*	*RUCR*	*Army (excluding UDR)*	*UDR*	*Civilians*[1]	*Total*
1988	4	2	21	12	54	93
1989	7	2	12	2	39	62
1990	7	5	7	8	49	76
1991	5	1	5	8	75	94
[2]1992	—	—	—	—	14	14

[1] Category includes suspected terrorists.
[2] As at 30 January.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the increase or decrease in the number of persons charged with terrorist offences in Northern Ireland each year since 1985.

Dr. Mawhinney: Set out are the number of persons charged with terrorist offences for each year since 1985:

Persons charged with terrorist offences

Year	*Number*
1985	522
1986	655
1987	468
1988	439
1989	433
1990	380
1991	[1]397

[1] provisional figure.

Notes:
1. Statistics on charges are kept according to the most serious offence with which an individual has been charged.
2. If the same individual is charged on more than one occasion, he/she will be added to the statistics each time.

Heart Surgery

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the projected figures for those awaiting coronary artery by-pass surgery in Northern Ireland for *(a)* January 1993 and *(b)* January 1994, allowing for the arrival of a fourth cardiac surgeon commencing on 1 April 1992.

Mr. Hanley: These figures cannot be calculated accurately for a number of reasons. The numbers waiting at January 1993 and January 1994 will be influenced by a number of different factors:

(a) the ability of the Royal Victoria hospital cardiac surgery unit to increase the number of operations carried out there;
(b) the number of by-passes purchased for residents of Northern Ireland by the four health and social services boards from hospitals in the rest of the United Kingdom and;
(c) the impact of the waiting time guarantee which will be included in the citizens charter shortly to be launched in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons the target of 1,100 cardiac operations per year in Northern Ireland has not been achieved; and if he will indicate *(a)* when it will be achieved and *(b)* what plans he has to review that figure.

Mr. Hanley: The target of 1,100 cardiac operations per year was the figure recommended by Sir John Badenoch in his 1988 report as necessary to meet the Province's need for cardiac operations. Attainment of that figure has not been possible because of physical and staffing constraints at the Royal Victoria hospital. Additional cardiac recovery facilities have now been provided and the cardiac theatres have been upgraded. However, the Eastern health and social services board has experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting an additional cardiac surgeon. I understand a locum cardiac surgeon has been appointed for one year and is expected to take up post on 1 May 1992. It is not possible at this stage to say when the figure of 1,100 operations will be reached but it will include cardiac operations purchased for Northern Ireland residents from centres other than the RVH. The figure will be regularly reviewed by the Department of Health and Social Services in the light of assessed need and the latest developments in medical technology.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients are awaiting their first appointment with a cardiac surgeon for assessment as to whether they are in need of cardiac surgery; and if these patients are counted as being on the waiting list for surgery.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what official statements have been made by health board staff concerning the relative benefits of coronary artery by-pass surgery as to *(a)* improving the quality of life and *(b)* increasing the lifespan of patients.

Mr. Hanley: I am not aware of any official statements by health board staff in Northern Ireland on this subject.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients are currently on the waiting list for *(a)* cardiac surgery and *(b)* cataract operations at the Royal Victoria hospital; how long they have been waiting; and what were the comparable figures for January 1987.

Mr. Hanley: At 30 September 1991 the latest date for which waiting list information is available centrally, there were 991 patients on the cardiac surgery in-patient waiting list at the Royal Victoria hospital. I have set out the details of how long they have been waiting. Figures for 30 September 1986 (the closest date to January 1987 for which data are comparable) are also shown. The time bands are slightly different due to a change in the recording of waiting list data from 1 April 1988. The information requested on cataract operations is not available centrally.

Patients waiting for admission by time waiting at 30 September

Months	*Patients*
1991[1]	
0-2	125
3-5	81
6-8	78
9-11	68
12-23	168
24+	471
Total	991
1986	
0-2	2
3-5	4
6-11	8
12-23	51
24+	342
Total	407

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest figure for those awaiting coronary artery by-pass surgery in Northern Ireland; and what was the figure in January 1991.

Mr. Hanley: I am advised by the Eastern health and social services board that at 30 November 1991 the latest

date for which figures are available, there were 758 people in Northern Ireland waiting for coronary artery by-pass surgery. The information for January 1991 is not available.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken to ensure that the necessary numbers of trained staff, backed by sufficient funds for their employment, will be made available to support a fourth cardiac surgeon in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The funds for the recruitment of the necessary supporting staff have been made available to the Eastern health and social services board by the Department of Health and Social Services. Their appointment is a matter for the board.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the health boards have for purchasing additional operations outside Northern Ireland; and what safeguards will be incorporated to ensure quality and a smooth handover for follow-up care within Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The Western health and social services board has already contracted to purchase a number of cardiac surgery operations in hospitals in Great Britain. The Eastern health and social services board is planning to do so shortly. Detailed safeguards to ensure quality care for patients while in hospital in Great Britain are incorporated in the contracts and arrangements are being made to ensure continuity of care when they return to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence he has that physicians and cardiologists are not referring patients for coronary artery by-pass surgery due to the low possibility that the patient would be offered cardiac surgery within a time scale of two years.

Mr. Hanley: I have no evidence to support the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

Prison Sentences

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern ireland if he will list in the *Official Report* the prison sentences served by *(a)* Kevin McKenna, *(b)* Brian Gillen and *(c)* Gerald Kelly, indicating the changes against each and the crimes for which they were found guilty and at which courts the charges were brought.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 27 January 1992]:* It would not be appropriate to give the information requested.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the proportion of costs for the environmentally sensitive areas scheme which is devoted to administration *(a)* in 1991 and *(b)* when the environmentally sensitive areas extensions and new environmentally sensitive areas are in operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Administration costs, including monitoring to assess the environmental impact of the environmentally sensitive areas scheme, currently amount to approximately 25 per cent. of the total costs. For the future my objective is to reduce these costs while maintaining the advisory role of project officers and their associated work in securing the environmental objectives of the scheme.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the hectarage and *(b)* the amount of money allocated to Pennine Dales ESA in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) when the new conditions will operate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The Pennine Dales environmentally sensitive area covers 15,970 hectares which will increase to 46,370 hectares under the new arrangements I recently introduced. Payments in the current financial year are forecast to total approximately £1 million. Future spending in this environmentally sensitive area will depend on the level of uptake but, given the increase in the area and the other changes to the scheme could exceed £3·5 million.

Farm Woodland Scheme

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his review of the farm woodland scheme.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 19 November 1991, c. 135]:* In my previous reply I announced that the main interested organisations were being consulted about detailed proposals for a farm woodland premium scheme (FWPS), to replace the pilot farm woodland scheme (FWS).

The Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland and I have finalised our proposals in the light of comments received from interested organisations. I am, therefore, laying before the House today the draft farm woodland premium scheme 1992 which, subject to parliamentary approval, we propose to introduce on 1 April. This draft statutory instrument applies to Great Britain: the scheme will be introduced in Northern Ireland by separate arrangement.

The new arrangements will offer increased establishment grants and better incentives to encourage farmers to convert land in agricultural use to woodland. They will be very much easier for farmers to understand, and simpler to operate, than under the farm woodland scheme. Our proposals were welcomed in principle by all consultees although a number of detailed points were raised. We have given careful consideration to these points and in particular those mentioned by environmental interests.

The objectives of the FWPS are to encourage planting of woodland by farmers who will remain in farming, thereby enhancing the farmed landscape and environment; and to encourage a productive alternative land use to agriculture. We intend that the scheme will be environmentally beneficial and we have included a number of safeguards to minimise the risk of environmentally damaging planting. In particular, applications will be subject to environmental and silvilcultural checks by the Forestry Commission and to its consultation arrangements. Also there are limits on planting on unimproved land in the LFAs and the definitions of arable land and improved grassland are designed to ensure that

environmentally sensitive sites are protected. We also propose to monitor the way in which the procedures work and the level of planting on unimproved land. We will review the position each year so that action can be taken if there are any problems. We will keep interested organisations informed and consult them as necessary.

The key features of the FWPS are as follows:—

Farmers will apply first to the Forestry Commission for grants for establishing trees under the woodland grant scheme, including the better land supplement and community woodland supplement where appropriate. They will then apply to Agriculture departments for the annual incentives under the farm woodland premium scheme.

Annual incentives of between £130 and £250 per hectare will be paid for the conversion to arable or improved grassland to woodlands. Annual incentives of £60 per hectare will be paid for the conversion of woodlands of unimproved land in the less favoured areas only.

The annual incentives will be available for two categories of woodland: *more than 50 per cent.* and *50 per cent. or less* by area of broadleaved trees. These categories will attract payments for 15 and 10 years respectively

There will be no limit on the number of applications that can be made, but planting must not, in aggregate, exceed more than 50 per cent. of any individual agricultural unit. In addition planting of unimproved land must not exceed 40 hectares of any individual agricultural unit. However, for planting on the common grazings in the Scottish crofting counties there will be a total limit of 100 hectares for each common grazing area.

The definition of "improved grassland" will be based on the content of "productive" species in the sward. This has the advantage of being easily checked by a physical inspection, it protects sensitive sites and puts no restriction on the method of grassland improvement.

Conversion of land to arable or improved grassland must have taken place at least three years before the application is made.

No quotas or targets will be set for the scheme, but it will be subject to cash limits.

In certain circumstances farmers will be able to cancel their FWS applications and reapply for the FWPS.

WALES

Radon Gas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many measurements for levels of radon gas have been carried out in each district authority area of Wales for each year between 1988 and 1991.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Over 1,100 dwellings have been included in a survey of radon levels in Wales which the National Radiological Protection Board is carrying out on behalf of the Department.

South Wales Integrated Development Operation

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the names and occupations of the members of the Industrial South Wales Integrated Development Operation Monitoring Committee; on what dates this committee met during the last year; which persons attended those meetings; and what conclusions or decisions were reached.

Mr. David Hunt: The names of the members of the Industrial South Wales Integrated Development Operation (IDO) Monitoring Committee, and the organisations they represent, are as follows:

Miss E. N. M. Davies *(Chairperson)*	European Affairs Division Welsh Office
Dr. M. C. Dunn	European Affairs Division Welsh Office
D. N. Davies Esq. Principal assistant in policy	Dyfed county council
P. Slater Esq. Head of European regional policy	Gwent county council
Dr. V. Winckler Principal officer unit	Mid Glamorgan county council
A. J. Barnish Esq. BCom, IPSA Chief executive and county treasurer	Powys county council
J. Andrews Esq. Assistant economic development officer	South Glamorgan county council
R. C. L. Crawshaw Esq. County economic development officer	West Glamorgan county council
R. Leadbeter Esq. MA(Oxon) IPFA FRVA Chief executive	Blaenau Gwent borough council
D. A. Dalwood Esq. Planning and industrial development officer	Brecknock borough council
M. Turvey Esq. Head of policy unit	Cardiff city council
R. C. Meade Esq. Principal planning officer	Carmarthen district council
C. Burns Esq. Economic development officer	Cynon Valley borough council
T. Williams Esq. Economic development officer	Dinefwr borough council
Miss A. V. Phillips Economic development officer	Islwyn borough council
D. Clive Davies Esq. Director of development	Llanelli borough council
J. C. Howells Esq. IPFA FRVA AMBIM Chief Executive	Lliw Valley borough council
Mrs. K. Pritchard Economic development and tourism officer	Merthyr Tydfil borough council
H. Williams Esq. Senior planner	Monmouth borough council
A. Jenkins Esq. Director of development and control	Neath borough council
R. Davies Esq. Chief executive's department	Newport borough council
J. G. Cole Esq. Solicitor Chief executive officer	Ogwr borough council
G. A. Causley Esq. Economic development officer	Planning department Port Talbot borough council

J. Cunnane Esq. Planning officer	Rhondda borough council
I. MacVicar Esq. Economic development officer	Rhymney Valley district council
A. G. Edwards Esq. Assistant to chief executive	Swansea city council
R. Pearce Esq. Assistant chief planning officer	Taff Ely borough council
G. D. Edmunds Esq. Borough treasurer	Torfaen borough council
D. C. Holloman Esq. Chief financial officer	Vale of Glamorgan borough council
E. A. J. Carr Esq. Chief executive	CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments
Robert E. Hall Esq. Principal accountant	Cardiff Bay development corporation
M. J. Hollingsworth Esq. Chief planning adviser	Land Authority for Wales Custom House
Paul Varallo Esq. Regional E & Q Services Officer	National Rivers Authority (Welsh region)
Dr. D. A. Cadwallader Regional officer	The Nature Conservancy Council
L. Tatham Esq.	Sports Council for Wales
M. J. Clancy Esq.	Training Enterprise and Education Directorate
P. Loveluck Esq. Chief Executive	Wales Tourist Board
D. Farnsworth Esq. Executive Director	Welsh Development Agency
Malgwyn Davies Esq. Chief Executive Officer	Bryn Bach Park Joint Management Committee
P. Fortune Esq. Managing Director	Cardiff and Vale Enterprise
H. Evans Esq. Managing Director	Computeraid
Miss Susan Price Director	Groundwork South Wales
Mike Jones Esq. Business Services Director	Merthyr Aberdare Development Enterprise/Economic Development Partnership Ltd.
Peter Davies Esq. Director	Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association
Gareth Bray Esq. Executive Director	Enterprise Taf Ely Ogwr Partnership Ltd.
Clem Thomas Esq. Manager	Penrhyrs Craft Training Workshop
Mrs. Joan Richards Development Officer	Port Talbot Co-operative Development Agency
Gwyn Jones Esq. General Manager	Rhondda Enterprise Ltd.
I. MacVicar Esq. Economic Development Officer	Rhymney Valley Economic Development Partnership
Director	Severn Tidal Power Group
Ms. Jean Golten Finance Officer	South Glamorgan Women's Workshop
N. F. Cakebread Esq. Port Accountant	Associated British Ports Docks Office
P. G. Weavers Esq. Regional Projects Manager	British Coal Corporation Opencast Executive (South Wales Region)
Winsor T. Lewis Esq. Regional Manager	British Coal Enterprise Ltd.
A. J. Clegg Esq. Grants Manager	British Railways Board
B. J. Margrett Esq. Director	British Steel (Industry) Ltd.
W. D. Thomas Esq. Planning Manager	Welsh Water (South Western Division)
Richard Dowers Esq. Assets and Investments Manager	Welsh Water (South Eastern Division)
A. Plumpton Esq. Director of Finance and Secretary	John Grooms Association for the Disabled
Mohammed Akterussaman Esq. Acting General Manager	Fullemploy Wales
Ms. Helen Seymour ESF Co-ordinator	Industrial Common Ownership Movement
P. C. C. Mitchell Esq. Regional Director	The National Trust
N. J. Barnett Esq. Property Manager (South)	National Power
Professor P. A. Witting Executive Head of International Office	Polytechnic of Wales
M. Betts Esq. Regional Director	Hotel and Catering Training Co. (HCTC)
Martin McCauley Esq. Team Leader	Higher Education ESF Unit
P. R. Snadden Esq.	The Corporation of Trinity House Lighthouse Service
Mrs. M. Fleming Assistant Director	University College of Swansea Department of Adult Continuing Education and Training
Dr. M. A. Joynson European Liaison Officer	University of Wales, Cardiff
Norman Watson Esq. Deputy Chief Executive	Wales Co-operative Development and Training Centre
Ms. Helen McLaughlin ESF Officer	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
Mrs. Maureen De Viell ESF unit	Department of Employment
Gerard Millar Esq.	Department of Transport Marine Directorate

Jack Engwegen Esq	Commission of the European Commission DGXVI (regional policy)
Nigel Scott Esq	Commission of the European Commission DGV (employment, social affairs and education)

The Committee met on 17 May, 25 July, 25 September and 13 December 1991. The majority of those listed attended all of these meetings.

The main business of the committee was to commit grants from the European regional development fund and European social fund made available under the Industrial South Wales IDO for 1989-91. These grant allocations were substantially complete by the end of 1991.

Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the names and occupations of the regional committee for Wales of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards.

Mr. David Hunt: The membership of the Welsh committee of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards as at December 1991 is listed as follows:

Mr. J. W. Owen *(Chairman)*	— NHS Director
Mr. D. A. Aiken	— Obstetrics
Dr. H. Bevan-Jones	— Psychiatry
Mr. A. J. Beddow	— Management
Dr. D. W. Gregory	— Radiology
Dr. B. Harris	— Mental Illness
Professor L. E. Hughes	— Surgery
Dr. G. A. D. Rees	— Anaesthetics
Mr. M. S. Bennett	— Obstetrics
Mr. G. Boulton	— Management
Dr. H. A. Edwards	— Anaesthetics
Mr. G. H. Griffiths	— General Surgery
Dr. D. Hine	— Public Health Medicine
Dr. J. H. Jones	— General Medicine
Mr. A. Jones	— Management
Dr. R. H. T. Jones	— Paediatrics
Dr. R. J. Kellett	— Histopathology
Mr. J. P. Matthews	— Orthopaedics
Professor J. M. Stark	— Medical Microbiology/ Pathology
Mr. C. H. Thomas	— Management
Dr. R. S. Vaughan	— Anaesthetics
Mr. P. Wilson	— General Surgery
Dr. F. K. Wright	— General Medicine

Site Management

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of management agreements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which have been entered into in *(a)* national nature reserves and *(b)* sites of special scientific interest for each year since 1981 in Wales, indicating in each case whether the proposed damage was done to (i) agriculture or (ii) forestry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The figures requested are shown in the following table. Not all are the direct outcome of action taken under section 28 of the 1981 Act. The information requested on habitat could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Management agreements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

	Management agreements on	
	(a) NNR's (section 16 agreements)	*(b) SSSI (section 15 agreements)*
1981	0	0
1982	2	2
1983	1	1
1984	1	4
1985	2	2
1986	2	12
1987	0	35
1988	4	69
1989	5	58
1990	2	58
1991	1	58
1992	0	6
Totals	20	305

River Water

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects the agreement will be signed between Cardiff Bay development corporation and Associated British Ports to specify the allocation of river water at times of low flow in a manner that will comply with the requirements of the National Rivers Authority Wales division as described in his letter to the hon. Member dated 15 January.

Mr. David Hunt: As I indicated to the hon. Gentleman on 19 December, negotiations between Cardiff Bay development corporation and Associated British Ports are a matter for the two parties. I do not propose to speculate about the timing of an agreement.

Under-fives

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the figures for 1991 for the percentage of under-fives in *(a)* nursery schools, *(b)* nursery classes, *(c)* infant classes and *(d)* in total, by local education authority in Wales, in rank order.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The percentages of pupils under five years of age in LEA maintained nursery and primary schools, at January 1991, is given in the following table.

Children aged at 31 December

	Nursery schools	*Nursery classes*[1]	*Ordinary classes*[1]	*Total*
West Glamorgan	2·5	50·0	36·1	88·6
Clwyd	1·4	44·2	32·8	78·4
Mid Glamorgan	8·2	34·3	31·6	74·1
Gwent	8·9	27·7	32·4	69·0
Dyfed	2·2	24·8	38·2	65·2
South Glamorgan	7·0	22·6	26·0	55·6
Powys	—	22·6	29·1	51·7
Gwynedd	—	12·2	23·6	35·8

	Nursery schools	Nursery classes[1]	Ordinary classes[1]	Total
Wales	4·8	31·5	31·7	68·0

[1] These represent nursery and ordinary classes in maintained primary schools.

Management Agreements

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of management agreements that have been entered into under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in Wales where payments have been given in the following ranges *(a)* up to £9,999, *(b)* £10,000 to £19,999, *(c)* £20,000 to £29,999, *(d)* £30,000 to £39,999, *(e)* £40,000 to £49,999, *(f)* £50,000 to £59,999 and *(g)* over £60,000.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is shown as follows:

Management agreements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

	Lump sums only	Annual payments only	Annual payments combined with lump sum (first year only)
(a) Up to £9,999	8	287	20
(b) £10,000 to £19,999	2	3	—
(c) £20,000 to £29,999	1	1	—
(d) £30,000 to £39,999	—	—	—
(e) £40,000 to £49,999	—	—	—
(f) £50,000 to £59,999	—	—	—
(g) over £60,000	3	—	—
Totals	14	291	20

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the 10 sites of special scientific interest and *(b)* the 10 national nature reserves in Wales which have the most expensive management agreements giving the name of the site, county in which it is located and the amount which has been or is due to be paid out and if the landowners are required to positively enhance the site as part of the conditions of payment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is treated as confidential between the parties to the agreement.

Year of Literature and Writing

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what support the Welsh Office will give to support Swansea in the Year of Literature and Writing it has been awarded under Arts 2000; and what is the total allocation that has been made for the Garden festival.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Secretary of State congratulates the city of Swansea on its selection as host for the Arts 2000 Year of Literature and Writing 1995. He supported the city in its bid and affirms his support for the event. What form support might take will need to be considered in the light of any proposals which might be made by Swansea.

For the garden festival, the Secretary of State has allocated £19·37 million by way of urban programme support, and £12·108 million under the projects of regional or national importance scheme. In addition, £19·9 million has been spent to date by the Welsh Development Agency under the derelict land scheme.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Gwilym Jones To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the provision of the planning appeals system in Wales from 1 April.

Mr. David Hunt: My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced on 25 July last year the Government's decision to launch the planning inspectorate executive agency in England on 1 April 1992. We have now decided that the agency's operations should extend to Wales.

The framework document now being prepared will set out the relationship between the agency's chief executive, who will also be the chief planning inspector, and the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales.

The Government believe that this arrangement will provide the most efficient method of delivering the services of the planning inspectorate in England and Wales.

HEALTH

Pain Management

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available from 1987 onwards on waiting lists in each national health service region for pain management programmes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally.

Health Authority Contracts

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he conducts of contracts let by health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The terms and conditions of contracts let by health authorities are the responsibility of local management and, as such, subject to statutory audit like other health authority activity.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery in the South Western health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At 31 March 1991 there were a total of 13,400 people waiting for trauma and orthopaedic treatment in South Western regional health authority (a reduction of 723 compared with March 1990). Of that total 75 per cent. had waited less than one year. The numbers of patients waiting over one year and over two years fell from 3,486 and 1,162 in March 1990 to 3,341 and 858 in March 1991, reductions of 4 per cent. and 26 per cent. respectively.

Royal Naval Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details of the manner in which the Royal Naval hospital, Haslar, will be further utilised within the national health service in order to reduce waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A waiting list initiative has recently been set up at the Royal Naval hospital, Haslar, to treat up to 36 additional NHS patients waiting for urology treatment in Portsmouth and South East Hampshire district health authority.

There may be opportunities to make further use of these facilities to treat NHS patients in the future.

Children's Homes (Staff)

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the membership of the committee for the inquiry into the selection and recruitment of staff in children's homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The members of the Committee are as follows:

Chairman

Mr. Norman Warner (Formerly Director of Social Services, Kent County Council)

Committee

Mr. Richard Lansdowne (Consultant Psychologist, Department of Psychological Medicine, Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street)
Mr. Dick Clough (General Secretary, Social Care Association)
Mr. Dudley Procter (Chief Executive, Lincolnshire County Council)
Mrs. Susan Thomas (Chief Personnel Officer, London Borough of Lewisham)
Dr. Adrian Gozzard (TSB Group, Personnel Director)
Professor Jim Hughes (Director of Human Relations, Thorn EMI)
Ms. Florence Iles (Principal Consultant, William M. Mercer Fraser Ltd)
Mr. Richard White (Solicitor, White and Sherwin Solicitors)
Miss Adrianne Jones (Director of Social Services, Birmingham City Council)

Abortion

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the places approved by him under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The following places have been approved for the period 1 February 1992 to 31 January 1994:

Acland Nuffield Hospital—Oxford
AMI Alexandra Hospital—Cheadle, Cheshire
AMI Blackheath Hospital—London SE3
AMI Chaucer Hospital—Canterbury
AMI Highfield Hospital—Rochdale
AMI Park Hospital—Nottingham
AMI Portland Hospital—London W1
Avenue Clinic—Hove, Sussex
Bath Clinic—Coombe Down, Bath
Blackdown Nursing Home—Blackdown, Leamington Spa
Bromhead Hospital—Lincoln
BUPA Alexandra Hospital—Walderslade, Kent
BUPA Belvedere Hospital—Scarborough
BUPA Hospital—Bristol
BUPA Hospital—Bushey, Herts
BUPA Chaleybeate Hospital—Southampton
BUPA Hospital—Clare Park, Farnham
BUPA Hospital—Hull and East Riding, Hull
BUPA Hospital—Leicester
BUPA Murrayfield Hospital—Merseyside
BUPA North Cheshire Hospital—Warrington
BUPA Hospital—Norwich
BUPA Hospital—Portsmouth
BUPA South Bank Hospital—Worcester
Calthorpe Nursing Home—Edgbaston, Birmingham
Chatsworth Clinic—New Barnet, Herts
Chesterfield Nuffied Hospital—Bristol
Christchurch Park Hospital—Ipswich, Suffolk
Clementine Churchill Hospital—Harrow
Cleveland Nuffield Hospital—Stockton-on-Tees
Danum Lodge Nursing Home—Doncaster
Dean Park Nursing Home—Bournemouth, Dorset
Doncaster Independent Hospital—Doncaster
Droitwich Private Hospital—Droitwich, Worcs
Duchy Hospital, Truro—Treliske, Truro
Duchy Nuffield Hospital—Harrogate
Evelyn Hospital—Cambridge
Exeter Nuffield Hospital—Exeter
Fairfield Nursing Home—Buckhurst Hill, Essex
Fallodon Private Surgical Hospital—Leeds
Fitzwilliam Hospital—South Bretton, Peterborough
Foscote Private Hospital—Banbury, Oxon
Fulford Grange Hospital—Rawdon, Leeds
Garden Hospital—London NW4
Gisburne Park Hospital—Clitheroe, Lancs
Hampshire Clinic—Basingstoke
Hull Nuffield Hospital—Hull
Humana Hospital—London NW8
Leicester Nuffield Hospital—Leicester
Leigham Private Clinic—London SW16
Marie Stopes Nursing Home—London NW2
Merseyside Nursing Home—Liverpool
Newcastle Nuffield Hospital—Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
New Hall Hospital—Salisbury, Wilts
New Victoria Hospital—Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey
Parkfield Private Hospital—Rotherham, South Yorkshire
Parkview Clinic—London W5
Plymouth Nuffield Hospital—Plymouth
Raleigh Nursing Home—London SW2
Robert Nursing Home—Kings Norton, Birmingham
Rosslyn Nursing Home—East Twickenham, Middlesex
Royal Masonic Hospital—London W6
Salop Nuffield Hospital—Shrewsbury
Sandringham Private Hospital—King's Lynn
Sarum Road Private Hospital—Winchester, Hampshire
Somerset Nuffield Hospital—Taunton, Somerset
South Manchester Private Clinic—Stockport
St. Anns Hospital—London N15
Tapton Cliffe Clinic—Sheffield
Winterbourne Hospital—Dorchester, Dorset
Wistons Nursing Home—Brighton
Woking Nuffield Hospital—Woking
Wye Valley Nuffield Hospital—Hereford
Yorkshire Clinic—Bingley, West Yorkshire

Patients, South Derbyshire

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give figures for the number of patients treated in the southern Derbyshire district in 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: Between 1979 and 1990-91, the number of in-patients and day cases treated in national health service hospitals in Southern Derbyshire district health authority increased from 47,540 hospital discharges to 68,163 finished consultant episodes, an increase of 36 per cent. on a comparable basis.

Nurses

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the past five years *(a)* the number of qualified nurses that left the national health service, *(b)* the number of qualified nurses recruited to the national health service and *(c)* the total number of qualified nurses employed in the national health service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* Information in the detail requested is not available. The available information is given in the table.

England (whole-time equivalent)

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Number of qualified nurses and midwives in post in the National Health Service at 30 September[1]	246,280	248,250	250,670	252,740	252,870
Number completing pre-registration nurse training	24,100	22,110	17,390	18,150	19,010
Net wastage[2]	21,800	19,910	15,150	17,050	n/a

Source: Department of Health (SMI3) Annual Census of National Health Service Non-Medical Manpower; English National Board.

[1] Excludes agency staff.

[2] Net wastage is the total number of those who do not take up posts in the National Health Service on initial qualification and those who leave National Health Service employment, net of "returners". It is calculated by subtracting from the number of staff in post at the end of the financial year (average of successive September figures) the number of staff in post at the beginning of the year plus the number completing pre-registration nurse training during the year.

Notes:

1. Because enrolled nurses on conversion courses are included in both the "number of qualified nurses and midwives in post" and the "number completing pre-registration nurse training", the figures for net wastage will be overstated.
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest ten.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Personal Taxation

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in respect of a married man with two children *(a)* earning £99·20 per week gross income in April 1979 and *(b)* earning £300 ·30 per week gross income in April 1991 and counting child benefit as negative income tax what was (i) the amount paid in income tax in pounds per week and as a pecentage of gross earnings, (ii) the amount paid in national insurance contributions in pounds per week and as a percentage of gross earnings, (iii) the amount paid in VAT in pounds per week and as a percentage of gross earnings, (iv) the amount paid in other indirect taxation, exise duties etc., in pounds per week and as a percentage of gross earnings, (v) in respect of the man in category *(a)* the amount paid in domestic rates in pounds per week and as a percentage of gross-earnings, (vi) in respect of the man in category *(b)* the amount paid in community charge in pounds per week and as a percentage of gross earnings and (vii) respectively for categories *(a)* and *(b)* the total amount paid in the categories listed above in pounds per week and as a percentage of gross earnings.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* The figures requested are given in the table. No figures for the impact of the community charge in 1991-92 can be provided until data from the 1991 family expenditure survey are available.

Income tax, NICs, indirect tax and local tax payments. Married couple with two children.

	April 1979	*April 1991*
Assumed gross weekly earnings, £ per week	99·20	300·30
Amounts, £ per week		
Income tax	10·57	34·83
NICs	6·45	23·39
Total income tax and NICs	17·02	58·22
VAT	4·20	15·64
Other indirect taxes	8·83	22·52
Total excluding local taxes	30·05	96·38
Domestic rates	3·18	—
TOTAL	33·23	—
Percentage of earnings		
Income tax	10·6	11·6
NICs	6·5	7·8
Total income tax and NICs	17·1	19·4
VAT	4·2	5·2
Other indirect taxes	8·9	7·5
Total excluding local taxes	30·3	32·1
Domestic rates	3·2	—
TOTAL	33·5	—

Notes:

1. Income tax payments are calculated on the assumption that the households receive no tax reliefs other than the standard allowances and only have income from employment. All earners are assumed to pay class 1 NI contributions at the contracted-in rate.
2. Child benefit is treated as a negative income tax. For 1991-92, the figure used reflects the revised child benefit rates introduced in April 1991.
3. The estimates of indirect taxes are based on equations derived from the 1985 family expenditure survey, uprated to later years using

forecasts of aggregate tax receipts. They are based on average expenditure patterns for the United Kingdom as a whole and use the illustrative assumption that 10 per cent. of disposable income is saved. There are wide variations in spending patterns between households with the same composition and similar incomes. Estimated payments of VAT and other indirect taxes are therefore approximate. Due to sampling variation, there can be substantial differences between estimates obtained from family expenditure surveys for different years.

SOCIAL SECURITY

House Sales

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to direct the Benefits Agency not to treat any revenue accrued from the sale of a house as business income for benefit purposes.

Mr. Jack: Where capital realised from the sale of a home is intended to be used for the purchase of another home it can be disregarded as income or capital for benefit purposes. Where, however, this is not the intention and the proceeds are invested into a business, such revenue is treated as income for calculating benefit.

Means-related Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to review the working of the tariff income schedule used to calculate the returns of savings for the purposes of assessing incomes for means-related benefits.

Miss Widdecombe: As with all aspects of the benefits system, the tariff income rule is kept under review, but there are no plans to change it at present.

National Insurance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of class 2 national insurance paid in 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what estimates he has made of the total amounts he expects to take in during 1992-93 from class 2 national insurance contributions.

Mr. Jack: In 1990-91 the total amount of class 2 national insurance contributions paid was £500 million. We estimate that in 1991-92 and 1992-93 the amount paid will be £550 million and £590 million respectively.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people paid class 4 national insurance contributions in 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what estimates he has made of how many people he expects to pay class 4 national insurance contributions in 1992-93.

Mr. Jack: In 1990-91 about 2 million people paid class 4 national insurance contributions. We expect that approximately the same number will pay in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of class 4 national insurance paid in 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what estimates he has made of the total amount he expects to take in during 1992-93 from class 4 national insurance contributions.

Mr. Jack: In 1990-91 the total amount of class 4 national insurance contributions paid was £630 million. We estimate that in 1991-92 and 1992-93 the amount paid will be £700 million and £770 million respectively.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people paid class 2 national insurance contributions in 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what estimates he has made of how many people he expects to pay class 2 national insurance contributions in 1992-93.

Mr. Jack: In 1990-91 about 2·5 million people paid class 2 national insurance contributions. We expect that approximately the same number will pay class 2 in 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Departmental Planning

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 28 January, *Official Report*, column *515*, what planning system is operated by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The DSS planning system requires its agencies and headquarters to draw up costed plans furthering the Department's aims and objectives. The system was developed as part of the DSS response to the financial management initiative and "next steps". Plans include a range of targets, covering quality of service, efficiency and financial performance, and provide a basis for judging performance and for estimating resource requirements in the public expenditure survey.

Recent developments in the planning process will result in better and more public accountability of DSS through the published business plans and annual reports and accounts of its agencies.

An overview of the forward plans and past performance of DSS is contained in the published 1991 departmental report, Cm 1514. The 1992 report will be published in February 1992.

Social Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Department of Social Security funded evaluation of the social fund, carried out by the social policy and research unit of York university, will be made available to *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* the public and *(c)* hon. Members.

Mr. Scott: The report has not yet been received and it is too early to say when it will become available.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people have received the £6 cold weather payment during the month of January; how this figure differs from departmental estimates of take-up for the same period; and how many such payments, during this same period, were made in Merseyside.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Family Credit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to respond directly to hon. Members' queries on the policy aspects of family credit as opposed to referring them to the Benefits Agency for a reply.

Mr. Jack: Ministers answer letters relating solely to policy and remain fully accountable to Parliament for the work of the Department, including its executive agencies. The terms upon which social security agency chief executives answer hon. Members' queries was set out in a letter sent to all Members of Parliament in March 1991. I shall send a copy of the letter to the hon. Member.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total level of debt charges for further education colleges and sixth form colleges in England and Wales.

Mr. Eggar: The total capital financing charge in relation to maintained colleges of further education in England was £103 million in 1989-90, the latest year for which outturn information is available. The information on sixth form colleges cannot be disaggregated from that on schools. The position in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has made any estimates of the transitional costs to further education and sixth form colleges in achieving corporate status, in terms of transitional seconded staff, professional services/advice, additional accountancy and management information systems.

Mr. Eggar: The transitional costs in 1992-93 of the necessary preparations for incorporating further education and sixth form colleges and giving them independence from local authority control, subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament, are estimated at £25 million in England. This figure includes costs to colleges of preparing for their new management responsibilities, as well as the cost of establishing the Further Education Funding Council for England. Provision has been included in the Government's expenditure plans for 1992-93 for the purpose.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has made any estimates of the ongoing costs to further education and sixth form colleges of corporate status, in terms of *(a)* additional finance and personnel staff, *(b)* non-recoverable VAT, *(c)* legal, professional and audit costs, *(d)* payroll administration and processing and *(e)* increased pension contributions to support staff.

Mr. Eggar: The costs to colleges of undertaking or buying-in services currently provided by LEAs are expected to be offset by savings in LEA administration costs and efficiency savings. The liability on colleges to pay VAT on goods and services, once they become independent of LEA control, subject to the passage of the Further and Higher Education Bill, will give rise to costs of at least some £20 million. The level of pensions contributions is expected to be broadly in line with those currently made on behalf of college staff.

Student Numbers

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what projections have been made of full-time equivalent student numbers in further education up to the year 2000, and of the effects on public expenditure.

Mr. Eggar: The Department's latest statistical projection to the year 2000, as at September 1991, is as follows:

Projection of home and EC full-time equivalent student numbers in FE in England

(000s)

	Number
1990	696
1991	705
1992	722
1993	742
1994	779
1995	847
1996	896
1997	938
1998	972
1999	1,009
2000	1,050

This represents an increase of 50·9 per cent. between 1990 and 2000. The statistical projection is the central variant of a range. A range of statistical projections have been prepared with high, low, and central variants, reflecting the uncertainty of forecasting in this area.

Expenditure for further education will be considered in the annual surveys of public expenditure, in the light of student numbers and other pressures, but also taking account of the scope for efficiency savings.

Student Numbers

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what projections he has made of full-time equivalent student numbers in higher education up to the year 2000; and what estimate he has made of the cost of this.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department's latest projection to the year 2000, as at April 1991, is as follows:

Projection of home full-time equivalent student numbers in higher education in Great Britain

	Thousands
1990	795
1991	860
1992	918
1993	960
1994	984
1995	999
1996	1,024
1997	1,064
1998	1,110
1999	1,148
2000	1,170

This represents an increase of 47·2 per cent. between 1990 and 2000.

The higher education White Paper published last May made clear the Government's commitment to providing a fair share of public expenditure for higher education. Projected student numbers will be taken into account with other relevant factors in assessing the financial needs of higher education in the public expenditure survey.

Teacher Training

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students entered courses of initial teacher training in 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991, respectively; and how many of those students took courses in *(a)* mathematics, *(b)* physics and *(c)* chemistry.

Mr. Fallon: The relevant information is given in the table.

United Kingdom domiciled entrants to initial teacher training in England and Wales

	1988	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*
Total	20,183	21,757	23,795	28,792
of which				
Mathematics	1,143	1,139	1,091	1,549
Physics	456	377	410	527
Chemistry	342	400	421	500

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those schools in respect of which proposals for grant-maintained status have been published but not yet determined and which are the subject of conflicting reorganisation proposals, giving in each case the dates of the close of the periods of formal objection to each set of proposals, and grouping together those schools for which proposals are inter-related.

Mr. Eggar: The information is as follows. Inter-related proposals have been bracketed together.

Local education authority and school	*Expiry of objection period for GM proposals*	*Expiry of objection period for S12/13 proposals*
Kirklees		
Deighton High	19 February 1992	14 January 1992
Nottinghamshire		
Ravensdale Middle	7 January 1992	27 April 1991
Cumbria		
St. Aidan's High	6 May 1991	5 September 1991
Eden High	5 September 1991	5 September 1991
Trinity High	11 January 1992	5 September 1991
Surrey		
De Stafford High	10 July 1991	19 November 1991
Send (CE) First	17 July 1991	13 November 1991
Heathside High	17 August 1991	26 November 1991
Manor County First	17 August 1991	16 March 1992
Hawkedale First	17 September 1991	17 December 1991
Blindley Heath (CE) First	2 January 1992	19 November 1991
Kent		
Cliffe Woods Primary	1 September 1991	22 August 1990
Cliffe Woods Middle	25 March 1991	22 August 1990
Hoo St. Werburgh Middle	31 April 1992	22 August 1990
Edenbridge Middle	14 July 1991	15 August 1990
Ealing		
Wood End Middle	7 August 1991	3 July 1991
Wood End First	24 July 1991	3 July 1991
Essex		
Elmbridge High	15 October 1991	10 March 1992

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table listing the capital allocation for each grant-maintained school for 1992-93, grouped by local education authority area, together with the number of pupils on the roll of each school, with totals.

Mr. Eggar: I attach a list of the named project capital allocations from grant-maintained schools for 1992-93. In addition, each grant-maintained school will receive a formula allocation of capital grant, calculated as £10,000 per school plus £20 per pupil, based on January 1991 pupil numbers.

Named Project Capital allocations for grant-maintained schools in 1992-93

Allocations are in £000s
Pupil numbers taken from information submitted by schools with their bids

School and Project	*Total Project Allocation*	*Pupil Numbers*
Avon		
Beechen Cliff School		
Sanitary, drainage, asbestos etc	160	793
Oldfield School		
Urgent fabric and structure work	50	658
Totals for Avon	210	1,451
Barnet		
Queen Elizabeth's School for Boys		
Replace windows	50	1,087
Totals for Barnet	50	1,087
Bedfordshire		
Queensbury School		
Fire safety provisions	40	780
Totals for Bedfordshire	40	780
Berkshire		
Reading School		
Science and Technology facilities	630	675
St. Bartholemew's School		
Health and Safety	155	1,497
Totals for Berkshire	785	2,172
Birmingham		
Baverstock School		
Phase I—Building shell and Services	470	1,147
Great Barr School		
Technology facilities	700	2,050
Totals for Birmingham	1,170	3,197
Bradford		
Bingley Grammar School		
Science Wing Extension	250	951
Totals for Bradford	250	951
Bromley		
Bullers Wood School for Girls		

School and Project	Total Project Allocation	Pupil Numbers
Technology block	375	1,016
Totals for Bromley	375	1,106
Buckinghamshire		
Beaconsfield High School		
New Technology block and refurbishment	750	783
Totals for Buckinghamshire	750	783
Calderdale		
Crossley Heath School		
Fire precaution work	210	663
Totals for Calderdale	210	663
Derbyshire		
Ecclesbourne School		
Technology facilities	780	1,225
Totals for Derbyshire	780	1,225
Dorset		
Bournemouth School		
Rationalisation of Science and Technology facilities	546	897
Totals for Dorset	546	897
Essex		
Chalvedon School		
Re-cladding Middle School block	250	1,334
Westcliff High School for Boys		
Technology block	280	840
Totals for Essex	530	2,174
Gloucestershire		
Pate's Grammar School		
Phase II of rebuild	1,997	920
Ribston Hall High School		
Boilers and controls for heating	68	407
Stroud High School		
Science Block	780	727
Totals for Gloucestershire	2,845	2,054
Hampshire		
Hardley School		
Heating system repairs	130	656
Totals for Hampshire	130	656
Hertfordshire		
Francis Bacon		
Renewal of boilers and associated work	30	442
Rickmansworth School		
Remodel and repair craft block	250	999
Watford Grammar School for Boys		
Conversions to Design and Technology Centre	180	1,060
Watford Grammar School for Girls		
Design and Technology facilities	400	1,018
Totals for Hertfordshire	860	3,519
Hillingdon		
Northwood School		
Technology block and conversion	400	987
Queensmead School		
Roofing	52	966
Vyners School		
Science and Technology Block	638	913
Totals for Hillingdon	1,090	2,866
Kent		
Dartford Grammar School		
Technology and Science facilities	260	817
Thamesview School		
Health and Safety	100	1,084
Wilmington Boys Grammar School		
Boiler house renewal	145	342
Wilmington Girls Grammar School		
New Science Laboratory	170	482
Totals for Kent	675	2,725
Kirklees		
Heckmondwike Grammar School		
Repairs—old block	200	653
Totals for Kirklees	200	653
Lancashire		
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School		
Essential structural repairs	145	871
Lancaster Girls Grammar School		
Upgrading of Toilets and Cloakroom	50	665
Lancaster Royal Grammar School		
Information Technology Centre	124	864
Totals for Lancashire	319	2,400
Leicestershire		
Long Field High School		
Re-roofing phase II	100	360
Totals for Leicestershire	100	360
Lincolnshire		
Bourne Abbey Primary School		
Classrooms and medical facilities	160	502
Caistor Grammar School		
Technology, science and IT building	287	428
St. George's School		
Technology block	[1]500	921
Totals for Lincolnshire	947	1,851
Northamptonshire		
Kingsley Park Middle School		
Asbestos, fire escapes and technology	50	344
Kingswood School		
Food technology, graphics and technology rooms	330	936
Totals for Northamptonshire	380	1,280
Sandwell		
Manor High School		
Upgrade site to health and safety requirements	60	604
Totals for Sandwell	60	604
Southwark		
London Nautical School		
Upgrade science laboratory	150	408
Totals for Southwark	150	408
Surrey		
Collingwood School		
Fabric repairs	50	1,540
Guildford County		
New classroom block	370	765

School and Project	Total Project Allocation	Pupil Numbers
Totals for Surrey	420	2,305
Sutton		
Nonsuch High School for Girls		
Design and technology extension and remodelling	700	877
Totals for Sutton	700	877
Waltham Forest		
Highams Park School		
Re-roof technology workshops	29	1,054
Totals for Waltham Forest	29	1,054
Wandsworth		
Graveney School		
Toilet refurbishment	100	1,490
Totals for Wandsworth	100	1,490
Warwickshire		
Avon Valley School		
Roof repair	17	265
Totals for Warwickshire	17	265
Wolverhampton		
Wolverhampton Girls High School		
Phase I—Craft, Design and Technology	450	600
Totals for Wolverhampton	450	600
Totals	15,168	42,363

[1] Provisional allocation.

Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table, by local education authority, giving the name and location of *(a)* each grammar school and *(b)* each secondary modern school, with the number of pupils receiving full-time education in each school.

Mr. Fallon: The names and addresses, as currently recorded on the Department's index of educational establishments, of each grammar school and each secondary modern school in each local education authority in England and the number of pupils in each of those schools as at January 1991 are shown in the table. The table includes grant-maintained schools which are shown separately.

Names and addresses of grammar schools and secondary modern schools within each local education authority in England in January 1992

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
LEA Grammar Schools	
Barnet	
Henrietta Barnett School	
Central Square, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London	604
St. Michael's R.C. Convent School	
Nether Street, North Finchley, London	608
Bexley	
Bexley Grammar School	
Danson Lane, Welling, Kent	802
Chislehurst and Sidcup Grammar School	
Hurst Road, Sidcup, Kent	1,185
Bromley	
Newsteadwood Girls School	
Avebury Road, Orpington, Kent	678
St. Olave's School	
Goddington Lane, Orpington, Kent	630
Enfield	
The Latymer School	
Haselbury Road, Edmonton, London	1,246
Hounslow	
Tiffin Girls School	
Richmond Road, Kingston upon Thames, Surrey	796
Tiffin School	
Queen Elizabeth Road, Kingston, Surrey	879
Redbridge	
Ilford Boys School	
Fremantle Road, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex	625
Woodford County High School	
High Road, Woodford Green, Essex	617
Surrey	
Sutton Manor High School	
Manor Lane, Sutton, Surrey	586
The Wallington Boys High School	
Croydon Road, Wallington, Surrey	590
The Wallington Girls High School	
Woodcote Road, Wallington, Surrey	763
Birmingham	
Sutton Coldfield Girls School	
Jockey Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands	773
King Edward VI School	
Frederick Road, Aston, Birmingham	620
Camp Hill Boys School	
Vicarage Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham	624
Camp Hill Girls School	
Vicarage Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham	608
Five Ways School	
Scotland Lane, Bartley Green, Birmingham	629
Handsworth School	
Rose Hill Road, Soho, Birmingham	819
Bishop Veseys Grammar School	
Lichfield Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands	825
Walsall	
Queen Mary's Grammar SchoolSutton Road, Walsall, West Midlands	662
Queen Mary's High School	
Upper Forster Street, Walsall, West Midlands	621
Wirral	
Wirral Boys Grammar School	
Cross Lane, Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside	832
Wirral Girls Grammar School	
Heath Road, Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside	818
Calday Grange Grammar School	
Grammar School Lane, West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside	1,010
West Kirby Girls Grammar School	
Graham Road, West Kirby Wirral, Merseyside	991
Trafford	
Altrincham Boys School	
Marlborough Road, Altrincham, Cheshire	623
Altrincham Girls School	
Cavendish Road, Altrincham, Cheshire	757

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
Stretford Grammar School	
Edge Lane, Stretford, Manchester	478
Urmston Grammar School	
Newton Road, Urmston, Manchester	764
Sale Grammar School	
Marsland Road, Sale	1,217
Avon	
Cotham Grammar School	
Cotham Lawn Road, Cotham, Bristol	983
Fairfield Grammar School	
Fairlawn Road, Montpelier, Bristol	466
Berkshire	
Kendrick Girls School	
London Road, Reading, Berkshire	590
Langley Grammar School	
Reddington Drive, Langley, Slough, Berkshire	602
Herschel School	
Northampton Avenue, Slough, Berkshire	502
Upton Grammar School	
Lascelles Road, Slough, Berkshire	537
St. Bernards School	
1 Langley Road, Slough, Berkshire	705
Buckinghamshire	
Dr. Challoners Grammar School	
Chesham Road, Amersham, Buckinghamshire	1,027
The John Hampden Grammar School	
Marlow Hill, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	598
Sir William Borlases School	
West Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire	570
Burnham Grammar School	
Hogfair Lane, Burnham, Buckinghamshire	440
The Lady Verney High School	
Kingshill Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	379
Aylesbury High School	
Walton Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	1,072
Dr. Challoners High School	
Cokes Lane, Little Chalfont, Amersham, Buckinghamshire	786
Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School	
Oxford Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	640
Chesham High School	
Whitehill, Chesham, Buckinghamshire	812
Aylesbury Grammar School	
Walton Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	1,096
The Royal Latin School	
Brookfields, Buckingham, Buckinghamshire	680
The Royal Grammar School	
Amersham Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	1,110
Wycombe High School	
Marlow Hill, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	970
Devon	
Torquay Boys Grammar School	
Shiphay Manor Drive, Torquay, Devon	873
Torquay Girls Grammar School	
30 Shiphay Lane, Torquay, Devon	767
Churston Grammar School	
Greenway Road, Churston Ferrers, Brixham, Devon	729
Devonport Boys High School	
Paradise Road, Stoke Plymouth, Devon	753
Devonport Girls High School	
Lyndhurst Road, Peverell, Plymouth, Devon	656
Plymouth High School	
St. Lawrence Road, Plymouth, Devon	431
Dorset	
Fosters School	
Tinneys Lane, Sherborne, Dorset	169
Lord Digbys School	
Newland, Sherborne, Dorset	147
Parkstone Grammar School	
Sopers Lane, Poole, Dorset	621
Poole Grammar School	
Gravel Hill, Poole, Dorset	694
Bournemouth Girls School	
Castle Gate Close, Castle Lane, West Bournemouth	821
Essex	
Colchester Girls School	
Norman Way, off Lexden Road, Colchester, Essex	655
Southend Boys School	
Prittlewell Chase, Southend on Sea, Essex	809
Westcliff Girls School	
Kenilworth Gardens, Westcliff on Sea, Essex	879
Southend Girls High School	
Southchurch Boulevard, Southend on Sea, Essex	816
Chelmsford High School	
Broomfield Road, Chelmsford, Essex	662
The Royal Grammar School	
6 Lexdon Road, Colchester, Essex	643
King Edward VI School	
Broomfield Road, Chelmsford, Essex	702
Gloucestershire	
Crypt School	
Podsmead, Gloucester	358
Sir Thomas Rich's School	
Oakleaze, Gloucester	428
Denmark Road High School	
Denmark Road, Gloucester	475
Kent	
Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Girls	
Southfield Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	816
Tonbridge Grammar School for Girls	
Deakin Leas, Pembury Road, Tonbridge, Kent	856
Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys	
St John's Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	624
The Weald of Kent Grammar School for Girls	
Tudeley Lane, Tonbridge, Kent	399
Chatham Grammar School for Girls	
Rainham Road, Chatham, Kent	565
Chatham Grammar School for Boys	
Holcombe, Maidstone Road, Chatham Kent	482
Fort Pitt Grammar School for Girls	
Fort Pitt, Chatham, Kent	727
Rainham Mark Grammar School	
Pump Lane, Gillingham, Kent	985
The Harvey Grammar School	
Cheriton Road, Folkestone, Kent	684
Dover Boys Grammar School	
Astor Avenue, Dover, Kent	508
Dover Girls Grammar School	
Frith Road, Dover, Kent	562
Chatham House Grammar School for Boys	
Chatham Stree, Ramsgate, Kent	636
Clarendon House Grammar School for Girls	
Clarendon Gardens, Ramsgate, Kent	553
Dane Court Grammar School	
Broadstairs Road, Broadstairs, Kent	904
The Howard Grammar/High School	
Derwent Way, Rainham, Gillingham, Kent	1,742
The Barton Court Grammar School	
Longport, Canterbury, Kent	453
The Folkestone School for Girls	
Coolinge Lane, Folkestone, Kent	744
Rochester Grammar School for Girls	
Maidstone Road, Rochester, Kent	475
Sir Roger Manwoods School	
Manwood Road, Sandwich, Kent	628

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
Sir J Williamsons Mathematical School	
Maidstone Road, Rochester, Kent	752
Queen Elizabeths School	
Abbey Place, Faversham, Kent	620
Simon Langton Girls School	
Old Dover Road, Canterbury, Kent	844
The Skinners Co. School	
St Johns Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	668
The Judd School	
Brook Street, Tonbridge, Kent	701
Gravesend Grammar School for Boys	
Church Walk, Gravesend	503
Gravesend Grammar School for Girls	
Pelham Road, Gravesend	600
Highworth Girls School	
Quantock Drive, Ashford	574
The Norton Knatchbull School	
Hythe Road, Ashford	556
Lincolnshire	
Kesteven and Grantham Girls School	
Sandon Road, Grantham, Lincolnshire	742
Kesteven and Sleaford High School	
Jermyn Street, Sleaford, Lincolnshire	456
Boston Girls High School	
Spilsby Road, Boston, Lincolnshire	759
Spalding Girls High School	
Stonegate, Spalding, Lincolnshire	712
Queen Elizabeths High School	
Morton Terrace, Gainsborough	773
Bourne Grammar School	
South Road, Bourne, Lincolnshire	467
Boston Grammar School	
South End, Boston, Lincolnshire	603
Queen Elizabeths Grammar School	
West Street, Horncastle, Lincolnshire	502
Spalding Grammar School	
Priory Road, Spalding, Lincolnshire	674
North Yorkshire	
Ripon Grammar School	
Clotherholme Road, Ripon, North Yorkshire	583
Skipton Girls High School	
Gargrave Road, Skipton-in-Craven North Yorkshire	523
Ermysted's Grammar School	
Gargrave Road, Skipton, North Yorkshire	507
Shropshire	
Newport Girls High School	
Wellington Road, Newport, Shropshire	218
Warwickshire	
Alcester Grammar School	
Birmingham Road, Alcester, Warwickshire	531
Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls	
Shottery Manor, Shottery, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire	403
Rugby High School for Girls	
Longrood Road, Bilton, Rugby, Warwickshire	520
King Edward VI Grammar School	
Church Street, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire	407
Lawrence Sheriff School	
Clifton Road, Rugby, Warwickshire	531
Wiltshire	
South Wilts Girls School	
Stratford Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire	710
Bishop Wordsworth's Boy's School	
11 The Close, Salisbury, Wiltshire	608
Grant-Maintained Grammar Schools	
Hammersmith and Fulham	
London Oratory School	
Seagrave Road, London	n.a.

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
Sutton	
Nonsuch Girls High School	
Ewell Road, Cheam, Surrey	874
Wilsons School	
Mollison Drive, Wallington	n.a.
Birmingham	
Handsworth Grammar School for Boys	
Grove Lane, Birmingham	772
Wolverhampton	
Wolverhampton Girls High School	
Tettenhall Road, Wolverhampton	584
Calderdale	
North Halifax High School	
Moorbottom Road, Illingworth, Halifax	640
The Crossley Heath School	
Savile Park, Halifax, Yorkshire	685
Kirklees	
Heckmondwike Grammar	
High Street, Heckmondwike, Kirklees	614
Leeds	
Bingley Grammar School	
Keighley Road, Bingley	n.a.
Berkshire	
Reading School	
Erleigh Road, Reading, Berkshire	645
Buckinghamshire	
Beaconsfield High School	
Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire	780
Cumbria	
Queen Elizabeth Grammar School	
Ullswater Road, Penrith	n.a.
Devon	
Colyton Grammar School	
Colyford, Colyton, Devon	462
Dorset	
Bournemouth School	
East Way, Bournemouth	872
Essex	
Westcliff High School for Boys	
Kenilworth Gardens, Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex	835
Gloucestershire	
Ribston Hall High School	
Stroud Road, Gloucester, Gloucestershire	405
Marling Boys High School	
Downfield Lodge, Downfield Road, Stroud, Gloucestershire	737
Stroud Girls High School	
Beards Lane, Stroud, Gloucestershire	698
Pate's Grammar School	
Upper School, Princess Elizabeth Way, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire	977
Hertfordshire	
Watford Grammar School for Boys	
Rickmansworth Road, Watford	n/a
Watford Grammar School for Girls	
Lady's Close, Watford	n/a
Kent	
Wilmington Grammar School for Girls	
Wilmington Grange, Parsons Lane, Wilmington, Dartford	426

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
Wilmington Grammar School for Boys	
Wilmington Hall, Common Lane, Dartford, Kent	307
Dartford Grammar School for Boys	
West Hill, Dartford, Kent	816
Dartford Grammar School for Girls	
Shepherd's Lane, Dartford	n/a
Simon Langton Boys Grammar School	
Langton Lane, Nackington Road, Canterbury	n/a
Cranbrook School	
Waterloo Road, Cranbrook	n/a
Lancashire	
Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar School	
Glen Road, Waterfoot, Rossendale, Lancashire	734
Lancaster Royal Grammar School	
East Road, Lancaster, Lancashire	864
Lancaster Girls Grammar School	
Regent Street, Lancaster	644
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	
Chatburn Road, Clitheroe, Lancashire	801
Lincolnshire	
Skegness Grammar School	
Vernon Road, Skegness, Lincolnshire	568
Queen Elizabeths Grammar School	
Station Road, Alford, Lincolnshire	336
The Kings School	
Brook Street, Grantham, Lincolnshire	764
Carries VC Grammar School	
Northgate, Sleaford, Lincolnshire	403
Caistor Grammar School	
Church Street, Caistor, Lincolnshire	410
King Edward VI Grammar School	
Edward Street, Louth	n/a
Shropshire	
Adams' Grammar School	
Newport, Shropshire	457
LEA Secondary Modern Schools	
Hillingdon	
Walsingham Roman Catholic School	
Springfield Road, Hayes, Middlesex	87
Kingston upon Thames	
Beverley School	
College Gardens, Blakes Lane, New Malden, Surrey	700
Coombe Girls School	
Clarence Avenue, New Malden, Surrey	994
Chessington Community College	
Garrison Lane, Chessington, Surrey	448
Hollyfield School	
Surbiton Hill Road, Surbiton, Surrey	705
Southborough School	
Hook Road, Surbiton, Surrey	488
Tolworth Girls School	
Fullers Way North, Surbiton, Surrey	1,005
Holy Cross Covent School	
Sandal Road, New Malden, Surrey	505
Richard Challoner School	
Manor Drive North, New Malden, Surrey	615
Sutton	
Carshalton Boys High School	
Winchcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey	714
Carshalton Girls High School	
West Street, Carshalton, Surrey	748
Cheam High School	
Chatsworth Road, Cheam, Surrey	957
Highview High School	
The Chase, Wallington, Surrey	312
Glenthorne Girls High School	
Sutton Common Road, Sutton, Surrey	786
Stanley Park High School	
Stanley Park Road, Carshalton, Surrey	588
Wirral	
Pensby Boys High School	
Irby Road, Heswall, Wirral, Merseyside	635
Pensby Girls High School	
Irby Road, Heswall, Wirral, Merseyside	687
Hilbre High School	
Frankby Road, West Kirby, Wirral	776
Bebington High School	
Higher Bebington Road, Bebington, Wirral, Merseyside	970
South Wirral High School	
Plymyard Avenue, Eastham, Wirral, Merseyside	1,017
Trafford	
Sale Moor Secondary School	
Norris Road, Sale, Cheshire	550
Ashton on Mersey School	
Cecil Avenue, Sale, Cheshire	858
Flixton Girls School	
Flixton Road, Urmston, Manchester	885
Lostock Secondary School	
Selby Road, Stretford, Greater Manchester	900
Wellacre School	
Irlam Road, Flixton, Trafford	535
Green Lane School	
Green Lane, Timperley, Cheshire	474
The New Wellington High School	
Moss Lane, Timperley, Altrincham, Cheshire	805
Stretford High School	
Great Stone Road, Stretford	456
St. Antony's Roman Catholic School	
Bradfield Road, Urmston, Manchester	414
Blessed Thomas Holford School	
Urban Road, Altrincham, Cheshire	571
Calderdale	
Clare Hall School	
Clare Hall, Oxford Road, Halifax	576
Exley Secondary School	
Park Lane, Halifax, West Yorkshire	362
Haugh Shaw School	
Moorfield Street, Halifax	311
Ovenden Secondary School	
Nursery Lane, Halifax, West Yorkshire	341
Holmfield High School	
Holdsworth Road, Holmfield, Halifax	507
Kirklees	
Liversedge Secondary School	
Roberttown Lane, Liversedge, West Yorkshire	459
Heckmondwike Secondary School	
Leeds Old Road, Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire	424
Berkshire	
Churchmead School	
Priory Way, Datchet, Slough, Berkshire	387
Westgate Secondary School	
Cippenham Lane, Slough, Berkshire	446
Baylis Court School	
Gloucester Avenue, Slough, Berkshire	298
Langley Wood School	
Langley Road, Slough, Berkshire	530
Wexham County Secondary School	
Norway Drive, Slough, Berkshire	418
Slough and Eton Church of England School	
Ragstone Road, Slough, Berkshire	425
St. Joseph's Roman Catholic School	
Shaggy Calf Lane, Slough, Berkshire	392
Buckinghamshire	

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
Buckingham County Secondary School London Road, Buckingham, Buckinghamshire	663
Chalfonts School Narcot Lane, Chalfont St. Peter, Buckinghamshire	934
Hatters Lane County Secondary School Hatters Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	543
The Grange School Wendover Way, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	898
Princes Risborough County Secondary School Merton Road, Princes Risborough, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	376
Wing School Aylesbury Road, Wing, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire	410
Misbourne Upper School Misbourne Drive, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire	679
The John Colet School Wharf Road, Wendover, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	632
Quarrendon Upper School Weedon Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	547
Great Marlow School Bobmore Lane, Marlow, Buckinghamshire	684
Mandeville School Ellen Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	600
Holmer Green Secondary School Parish Piece, Holmer Green, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	499
Cressex School Holmers Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	631
Burnham Upper School Opendale Road, Burnham, Buckinghamshire	383
Brenchwood School Faulkner Way, Downley, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	396
Beaconsfield Secondary School Wattleton Road, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire	468
Sir William Ramsey School Rose Avenue, Hazlemere, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	632
The Wye Valley School New Road, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire	354
The Amersham School Stanley Hill, Amersham, Buckinghamshire	423
Chesham Park School Chartridge Lane, Chesham, Buckinghamshire	494
St.Bernard's Roman Catholic Secondary School Dawe Hill Lane, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire	414
Waddesdon Church of England Secondary School Baker Street, Waddesdon, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire	473
Devon	
Audley Park School Barton Road, Torquay	1,026
Brixham Community College Higher Ranscombe Road, Brixham, Devon	516
Paignton Community College Waterleat Road, Paignton, Devon	1,169
Sir John Hunt School Lancaster Gafdens, Whitleigh, Plymouth, Devon	338
Devonport Secondary School Park Avenue, Devonport, Plymouth, Devon	289
St. Peters C of E School Wyndham Square, Plymouth, Devon	132
Axe Valley School Chard Street, Axminster	344
Dorset	
Herbert Carter School Blandford Road, Hamworthy, Poole, Dorset	379
Kemp-Welch School Herbert Avenue, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset	629
The Ashdown County Sec. School Adastral Road, Parkstone, Poole, Dorset	604
St. Aldhelms School Bristol Road, Sherborne, Dorset	538
St. Edwards R C School Dale Valley Road, Poole, Dorset	441
Henry Harbin School Wimborne Road, Poole, Dorset	974
Kent	
Dartford West High School for Boys Highfield Road, Dartford, Kent	650
Dartford West High School for Girls Heath Lane, Dartford, Kent	674
Huntleys Secondary School for Boys Culverden Down, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	132
The Wildernesse Secondary School for Boys Seal Hollow Road, Sevenoaks, Kent	644
Sevenoaks High School for Girls Bradbourne Vale Road, Sevenoaks, Kent	484
The Ridgewaye School Southborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	135
Hayesbrook School Brook Street, Tonbridge, Kent	482
Hillview Girls School Brionne Gardens, Tonbridge, Kent	589
Christchurch High School for Girls Magpie Hall Road, Chatham, Kent	540
Fort Luton High School for Boys Magpie Hall Road, Chatham, Kent	390
Rochester Chapter School Cliffe Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent	718
Temple Boys School Brompton Farm Road, Frindsbury, Rochester, Kent	562
Herne Bay High School Bullockstone Road, Herne Bay, Kent	697
The Frank Montgomery School Bredlands Lane, Sturry, Kent, Canterbury	545
The Sir William Nottidge School Bellevue Road, Whitstable, Kent	847
Sandwich High School Dover Road, Sandwich, Kent	563
The Charles Dickens High School Broadstairs Road, Broadstairs, Kent	790
King Ethelbert School Canterbury Road, Birchington, Kent	769
Ellington High School Ellington Place, Ramsgate, Kent	432
Hereson School Lillian Road, Ramsgate, Kent	370
The Robert Napier School Third Avenue, Gillingham, Kent	801
Woodlands High School Woodlands Road, Gillingham, Kent	448
The Hugh Christie Secondary School Norwich Avenue, Tonbridge, Kent	884
Upbury Manor School Marlborough Road, Gillingham, Kent	794
Walderslade High School for Girls Bradfields Avenue, Walderslade, Chatham, Kent	553
Hartsdown High School George V Avenue, Margate, Kent	830
Walderslade High School for Boys Bradfields Avenue, Walderslade, Chatham, Kent	616
Sandown Court Secondary School Blackhurst Lane, Tunbridge Wells, Kent	773
Conyngham High School Stirling Way, Ramsgate, Kent	494

	Number of pupils as at January 1991
Rainham School for Girls	
Derwent Way, Rainham, Kent	1,373
Rede Secondary School	
Carnation Road, Watling Street, Strood, Rochester, Kent	391
Wilmington High School	
Common Lane, Wilmington, Dartford, Kent	288
Chatham South School	
Letchworth Avenue, Chatham, Kent	616
Canterbury High School	
Knight Avenue, Canterbury, Kent	804
The Abbey School	
London Road, Faversham, Kent	1,085
St. Georges C of E High School	
Westwood Road, Broadstairs, Kent	897
The Holy Cross RC High School	
Ramsgate Road, Broadstairs, Kent	520
The Archbishop's C of E School	
St. Stephen's Hill, Canterbury, Kent	663
Southfields High School	
Singlewell Road, Gravesend, Kent	481
Northfleet Boys School	
Colyer Road, Northfleet, Kent	681
Northfleet Girls School	
Hall Road, Northfleet, Kent	769
Swanscombe School	
Swanscombe Street, Swanscombe	302
The Thomas Aveling School	
Arethusa Road, Rochester, Kent	794
Lancashire	
Ribblesdale School	
Queens Road, Clitheroe, Lancashire	748
Lincolnshire	
The Robert Manning School	
Edinburgh Crescent, Bourne, Lincolnshire	668
Ruskington Cotelands School	
Sleaford Road, Ruskington, Sleaford, Lincolnshire	212
The Aveland School	
Birthorpe Road, Billingborough, Sleaford, Lincolnshire	228
The Lafford School	
Fen Road, Billinghay, Lincolnshire	213
The Charles Read Secondary School	
Bourne Road, Corby Glen, Grantham, Lincolnshire	221
The Walton Girls High School	
Harlaxton Road, Grantham, Lincolnshire	479
Kitwood Boys School	
Mill Road, Boston, Lincolnshire	376
Kitwood Girls School	
Marian Road, Boston, Lincolnshire	314
Sir John Gleed Boys High School	
Halmer Gardens, Spalding, Lincolnshire	580
Sir John Gleed Girls High School	
Neville Avenue, Spalding, Lincolnshire	543
The Middlecott School	
Edinburgh Drive, Kirton, Boston, Lincolnshire	510
George Farmer County Secondary School	
Penny Hill Road, Holbeach, Spalding, Lincolnshire	417
The Peele County Secondary School	
84 Little London, Long Sutton, Spalding, Lincolnshire	458
The Giles County Secondary School	
Church Lane, Old Leake, Boston, Lincolnshire	504
St. Guthlacs High School	
Postland Road, Crowland, Peterborough	233
The John Spendluffe County Secondary School	
Hanby Lane, Alford, Lincolnshire	279
Yarborough School	
Grimsby Road, Caistor, Lincolnshire	378
Banovallum School	
Boston Road, Horncastle, Lincolnshire	388
The Gartree School	
Butts Lane, Tattershall, Lincolnshire	374
The Tennyson School	
Seaholme Road, Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire	319
The Earl of Scarborough High School	
Burgh Road, Skegness, Lincolnshire	1,051
The Castle Hills School	
The Avenue, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire	407
The Middlefield School	
Middlefield Lane, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire	516
The Thomas Conley School	
School Lane, Donington, Spalding, Lincolnshire	413
The William Lovell CE Secondary School	
Main Road, Stickney, Boston, Lincolnshire	292
St. Bedes RC Secondary School	
Tollfield Road, Boston, Lincolnshire	136
North Yorkshire	
Ripon City School	
Clotherholme Road, Ripon, North Yorkshire	414
Upper Wharfedale School	
Wharfeside Avenue, Threshfield, Skipton, North Yorkshire	246
Aireville Secondary School	
Gargrave Road, Skipton, North Yorkshire	502
Shropshire	
Burton Borough School	
Audley Avenue, Newport, Shropshire	781
Warwickshire	
Henley in Arden High School	
Stratford Road, Henley in Arden, Solihull, West Midlands	368
Kineton High School	
Banbury Road, Kineton, Warwickshire	1,056
Stour Valley Community School	
Darlingscote Road, Shipston on Stour, Warwickshire	326
Studley High School	
Crooks Lane, Studley, Warwickshire	435
Stratford Upon Avon High School	
Alcester Road, Stratford Upon Avon, Warwickshire	907
Bilton High School	
Lawford Lane, Bilton, Rugby	690
Alcester High School	
Gerrard Road, Alcester, Warwickshire	472
Bishop Wulstan RC High School	
Oak Street, Off Dunchurch Road, Rugby, Warwickshire	281
St Benedicts RC High School	
Kinwarton Road, Alcester, Warwickshire	249
Harris CE High School	
Harris Drive, Overslade Lane, Rugby, Warwickshire	566
Wiltshire	
Downton School	
Braemore Road, Downton, Salisbury, Wiltshire	337
Highburys Boys Secondary School	
Church Road, Laverstock, Salisbury, Wiltshire	470
St Edmunds CE Girls School	
Church Road, Laverstock, Salisbury, Wiltshire	519
St Josephs RC School	
Church Road, Laverstock, Salisbury, Wiltshire	185
Grant-Maintained Secondary Modern Schools	
Lincolnshire	
St Georges Secondary School	
Westholme, Westgate, Sleaford, Lincolnshire	864
Warwickshire	
Avon Valley School	
Newbold Road, Rugby, Warwickshire	290

Polytechnics

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what steps he took to satisfy himself that the procedures for the awarding of the surveying management contract at Anglia polytechnic were carried out in accordance with his Department's requirements;

(2) how the costs of staff redundancies arising out of competitive tendering procedures in polytechnics are funded.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on Thursday 30 January.

Howbury Grange School, Slade Green

Mr. Evennett To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to make a decision on the future of Howbury Grange school, Slade Green, Erith; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The section 12 proposals published by Bexley to close Howbury Grange school are currently being considered. My right hon. and learned Friend expects to announce his decision shortly.

Students, Irish Republic

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his reply on 15 January, *Official Report*, columns *583-84*, if the Government of the Republic of Ireland pay tuition fees for United Kingdom students attending courses of higher education in the Irish Republic.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This is not a matter falling within my Department's responsibilities. However I have had inquiries made and I understand that the Government of the Republic of Ireland do not pay tuition fees for any students attending university courses in the Irish Republic. In the non-university higher education sector fees for EC students, irrespective of nationality, attending most courses in the Republic are met by the Irish Government with a contribution from the European social fund. For other courses in the Republic in the non-university higher education sector the fees are paid by the individual, irrespective of nationality. Should the right hon. Member require further details he might like to contact directly the Department of Education, Dublin.

Boarding Schools

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Educationa and Science if he will list *(a)* for each local education authority and *(b)* by location, the current state-owned boarding schools and the pupil establishment for each school.

Mr. Fallon: Not all local education authorities have bording schools. The table lists boarding schools maintained by local education authorities, and the numbers and boarders on roll at January 1991, the latest date for which information is available.

LEA maintained schools

Local education authority and school	*Total number on roll*	*Boarders on roll*
Greenwich		
Crown Woods school	1,7737	73
Isles of Scilly		
Isles of Scilly school	112	20
Buckinghamshire		
The Royal Latin school	680	12
Royal Grammar school, High Wycombe	1,110	45
The Radcliffe school, Milton Keynes	1,745	8
Cambridgeshire		
The King's school, Peterborough	760	69
Cornwall		
Launceston college	1,070	15
Cumbria		
Dallam school	600	42
Keswick school	813	112
Derbyshire		
Lady Manners' school, Bakewell	1,338	29
Queen Elizabeth grammar school, Ashbourne	1,054	26
Devon		
St. Boniface's college, Plymouth	716	20
Queen Elizabeth's Community college, Crediton	1,259	54
Dorset		
Beaminster school	551	50
Shaftesbury school	706	48
Hardye's school, Dorchester	654	11
East Sussex		
Thomas Peacocke school, Rye	872	36
Essex		
Elmbridge school, Fyfield	148	148
Royal Grammar school, Colchester	643	17
Ursuline Convent school, Brentwood	749	30
Hockerill school, Bishops Stortford	343	343
Hampshire		
The King's school[1]	847	10
Peter Symonds' college[1]	1,090	70
Westgate school[1]	848	14
Hertfordshire		
St. George's school, Harpenden	856	101
Humberside		
Sir John Nelthorpe Comprehensive school, Brigg	677	12
Hull Trinity House school	265	15
Bridlington school	1,175	36
Kent		
Sir Roger Manwood's school, Sandwich	628	74
Folkestone High school for girls	744	6
Leicestershire		
Rutland Sixth Form college, Oakham	480	64
Ashby Grammar school, Ashby de la Zouche	1,274	34
Burleigh Community college, Loughborough	1,150	41
Lincolnshire		
De Aston School, Market Rasen	1,019	51
Cordeaux High school, Louth	610	60

Local education authority and school	Total number on roll	Boarders on roll
North Yorkshire		
Ripon Grammar school	583	51
Archbishop Holgate's school	542	8
Richmond school	1,116	5
Northamptonshire		
Magdalen college school	1,005	26
Northumberland		
Berwick County Middle school	386	10
Dr. Thomlinson's CE Middle school, Rothbury	215	14
Haydon Bridge High school	653	84
Nottinghamshire		
The Minster school, Southwell	1,3[illegible]	60
Oxfordshire		
Lord William's school, Thame	1,811	90
Burford school	1,138	90
Shropshire		
Adams' school, Wem	854	22
Somerset		
Brymore Secondary Technical school, Bridgwater	174	139
Surrey		
The Royal Alexander and Albert, Reigate	430	430
West Sussex		
Steyning Grammar school	1,439	59

The table lists grant-maintained boarding schools.

Grant-maintained Schools with Boarding

	NOR	BOR
Reading School, Berkshire	645	99
The Woodroffe School, Lyme Regis, Dorset	826	109
Old Swinford Hospital School, Dudley	544	371
Cranbrook School, Cranbrook, Kent	696	283
Lancaster Royal Grammar School, Lancashire	864	179
Caistor Grammar School, Caistor, Lincoln	410	57
King Edward VI School, Louth, Lincs	528	36
King's School, Grantham, Lincs	746	61
Skegness Grammar School	570	[1]25
Wymondham College, Norfolk	827	636
Adam's Grammar, Newport, Shrops	457	100
Sexey's School, Bruton, Somerset	381	238
Gordon's School, Woking, Surrey	281	187

[1] Boarding provision was added to Skegness Grammar school on 1 September 1991 and this figure applies to this date.

TRANSPORT

Dangerous Substances

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the documentation required by British drivers of vehicles carrying dangerous substances in order to enter other European Community states under EC directive 89/684/EEC when it comes into effect on 1 July.

Mr. Chope: British drivers of road tankers with a capacity of more than 3,000 litres and/or a permissible maximum weight exceeding 3·5 tonnes carrying dangerous substances, and of any vehicle carrying explosives or a tank container carrying dangerous substances will need to hold a full vocational driver training certificate in addition to meeting the existing requirements.

Driver Training

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the recognition by other member states of provisional certificates of training issued by his Department to meet the requirements of EC directive 89/684/EEC.

Mr. Chope: Provisional driver training certificates issued to meet the requirements of the directive will be valid for use only for domestic transport in the member state of issue.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in preparing United Kingdom legislation and training courses needed to meet the requirements of EC directive 89/684/EEC.

Mr. Chope: There has been no delay. The necessary arrangements for the implementation of the directive before the deadline of 1 July 1992 are well advanced.

Legislation to implement EC directive 89/684/EEC in the United Kingdom is being drafted by the Health and Safety Executive under the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. A consultative document was issued last summer and I expect to receive recommendations for regulations from the Health and Safety Commission shortly. The administrative arrangements for training courses to run from April 1992 are in hand.

Driving Licences

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how frequently drivers are required to renew their driving licence; what is the charge for renewing a driving licence; and if he will introduce compensation for those required to renew on the ground of age.

Mr. Chope: Provided they do not have any relevant disability or medical condition which may restrict the period for which the licence is granted and they have not been disqualified, drivers are required to renew their driving licence only at age 70. From age 70, licences are granted for, at most, three years at a time.

From 1 February, the fee for renewal is £6.

This fee is statutory and compensation is not considered appropriate.

Air Traffic Control

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made as to the adequacy of the present arrangements for air traffic control over Europe; what consultations he has had with other EC Governments on the matter; what actions in this connection are planned for the forthcoming United Kingdom presidency of the EC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Following a United Kingdom initiative, Transport Ministers of the member states of the

European civil aviation conference (ECAC) agreed in April 1990 a strategy for the harmonisation and integration of air traffic control systems in Europe. The first phase of this strategy, which has just been completed, consisted of a comprehensive assessment of the present arrangements for air traffic control in Europe. The second and third phases will comprise programme development and acquisition and implementation of new equipment.

My right hon. Friend has consulted a number of his colleagues in the EC on air traffic control matters. On 17 March he will be chairing a meeting in London of Transport Ministers of ECAC member states, which include all EC member states, to consider further measures to reduce flight delays and to cope with growth in air traffic. We expect the meeting to reach agreement on a major extension of the current strategy for air traffic control to the end of the century and beyond.

During the forthcoming United Kingdom presidency of the EC the Government will encourage the Commission to support fully the initiatives that we have initiated in ECAC. The Government will be seeking increased support from the EC for research and trials on air traffic management. The Government will also seek substantial progress on a proposal for a directive relating to mandatory technical and operational standards for the procurement of air traffic control equipment.

Relief Road, Manchester

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he now expects the public consultation to take place, in respect of the proposed Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Chope: Later this year.

Barnstaple Downstream Bridge

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give urgent consideration to the application by Devon county council for funding of the Barnstaple downstream bridge and the western link.

Mr. Chope: No such application has been made. The county council's current transport policies and programme document shows that it does not propose to start construction of this scheme until the year 2000.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what figures are available to show the number of vehicles on the road in England and Wales without valid vehicle duty excise licences; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what figures are available to him to show the number of vehicles on the road in Scotland without valid vehicle duty excise licences;

(3) what information is available to him to show the number of vehicles on the road in Northern Ireland without a valid vehicle duty excise licence.

Mr. Chope: I have been asked to reply.

Based on a roadside survey carried out in Great Britain in June 1989 the best estimate of the number of unlicensed vehicles currently in use on United Kingdom roads is 1·3 million. Separate regional figures are not available. Further details can be found in the Transport Statistics Report "Vehicle Excise Duty in Great Britain in 1989-90" which is available in the House Library.

SCOTLAND

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the administrative costs of the sale of the two Scottish electricity companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The costs to the Government in 1991-92 of the Scottish electricity share offers are estimated to be as follows:

	£ million
United Kingdom offers	
Underwriting	21·5
Selling and broking commission	4·2
Marketing	5·2
Share information office	4·3
Prospectus production and distribution	3·1
Receiving banks	11·5
Advisers' fees and expenses	11·1
Total (United Kingdom offers)	60·9
Overseas offers	7·9
Total (United Kingdom and overseas offers)	68·8

These costs represent about 2 per cent. of the total proceeds due from the sale of shares and from debt repayable to the Government, which together are estimated at £3,430 million. The costs exclude stamp duty and VAT on services provided to the Government, which are not net costs to the Exchequer. They also exclude the costs of the electricity vouchers issued to eligible shareholders in December 1991.

Expenditure on the sale in 1990-91 (exclusive of VAT) amounted to £4·6 million in advisers' fees and expenses and £1·2 million in other sale costs. The costs incurred in earlier years totalled £5·8 million (exclusive of VAT).

Primary School Classes

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of children in primary classes in Scotland in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1991, in classes of (i) 31 to 35, (ii) 36 to 39 and (iii) 40 and above.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* Information in the form requested is not available centrally.

ENERGY

Energy-intensity Ratio

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate Britain's energy-intensity ratio for each year since 1962; and what are his projected estimates for each year until 2010, based on current Government policy.

Mr. Wakeham: Since 1962 the energy ratio, defined as the ratio of primary energy demand to gross domestic product, has taken the following values:

Year	Value
1962	0·89
1963	0·88
1964	0·86
1965	0·87
1966	0·85
1967	0·84
1968	0·83
1969	0·83
1970	0·85
1971	0·83
1972	0·82
1973	0·80
1974	0·77
1975	0·75
1976	0·75
1977	0·74
1978	0·72
1979	0·72
1980	0·69
1981	0·67
1982	0·66
1983	0·64
1984	0·62
1985	0·62
1986	0·61
1987	0·59
1988	0·58
1989	0·58
1990	0·59

Projected future values of the energy ratio will be included in a forthcoming publication containing revised projections of CO_2 emissions and energy demand. These were described in a parliamentary answer on 6 December 1991, at columns *258-59*.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *377*, when he expects the transmission and distribution price control reviews by the director general of the Office of Electricity Supply to be completed.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The timing of the reviews is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply, having regard to conditions in the transmission licence and the public electricity supply licences.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the administrative costs of the sales of the 12 regional electricity companies and the two generating companies in England and Wales.

Mr. Wakeham: The costs of the electricity share offers in England and Wales incurred to date by the Government are estimated to be as follows:

	£ million
United Kingdom offers	
Underwriting	51·5
Selling and Broking Commission	13·8
Marketing	22·2
Share Information Office	12·6
Prospectus production and distribution	13·6
Receiving Banks	67·0
Adviser's fees	44·8
Other costs	5·2
Total (United Kingdom offers)	230·7
Overseas offers	26·6
Total (United Kingdom and Overseas offers)	257·3

These costs represent about 2·3 per cent. of the proceeds from the sale of shares in the electricity share offers and from the repayment of debt by the companies which, together, are estimated at £11 billion. The costs exclude stamp duty and VAT on services provided to the Government which are not net costs to the Exchequer, and incentives on employee and individual shareholdings. The figures include expenditure incurred from April 1990 to the end of December 1991, but do not include costs incurred in previous years primarily on the restructuring of the industry which amounted, on the same basis, to about £16·3 million.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Inquiry Reports

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many company inquiry reports have been completed, but not published; under which sections of the Companies Acts they were carried out; and what steps he is taking to clear reports for publication.

Mr. Redwood: The following table lists 11 unpublished inspectors' reports where the decision to publish remains under consideration. It is always considered whether there is any reason why a report should not be published immediately and publication may be deferred where, for example, to do so would prejudice criminal proceedings. Occasionally it is decided not to publish a report.

Company name	Type of Enquiry
British Anzani plc	S165 Companies Act 1948
Medway Secondary Metals plc	S165 Companies Act 1948
Graylaw Holdings Limited and Link Service Stations Limited	S165 Companies Act 1948
Bank Street Securities Limited	S165 Companies Act 1948
Pennine Commercial Holdings plc[1]	S165 Companies Act 1948
Guinness plc[1]	S432 and S442 Companies Act 1985
The Bestwood plc and Atlanta Fund Managers Limited	S432 and S442 Companies Act 1985 and S432 Companies Act 1985
Blue Arrow plc	S432 Companies Act 1985
BOM Holdings plc	S432 Companies Act 1985

[1] Interim.

Estate Agents

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions the powers under the Estate Agents Act 1979 have been used to prohibit unfit persons from doing estate agency work.

Mr. Leigh: The Director General of Fair Trading has used his powers under the Act to prohibit 150 persons from doing estate agency work and a further nine persons from doing certain types of estate agency work.

Queen's Award for Export

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the companies which have received the Queen's award for export since 1979, with the date of the award; and which of these companies are still in business *(a)* under the same name or *(b)* under a different name.

Mr. Sainsbury: Since 1979, a total of 1,336 Queen's awards for export achievement have been granted to industrial units within the United Kingdom. The awards are announced annually on the Queen's birthday, 21 April. The winners are listed in a supplement to the *London Gazette* on 21 April each year. No record is kept of award winners which are still in business, or of those which have changed their name. The information requested could not therefore be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Limited Liability

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received, and from whom, about the extension of limited liability to audit and accountancy firms.

Mr. Redwood: Since 1 October there has been no statutory bar on the appointment of a limited liability company as a company auditor provided it is eligible for appointment under the rules of its recognised supervisory body. We have received no representations on the subject since then.

Blue Arrow

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he now expects to publish his inspector's report on the Blue Arrow inquiry.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend decided to delay publication of the inspectors' report in the light of representations made to him. He intends to publish the report as soon as he considers it appropriate to do so.

Development Areas

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the work force in each of the standard regions of England live within the boundaries of development areas.

Mr. Leigh: The answer, which also includes figures for intermediate areas, is as follows:

per cent.

Region	*Development areas*	*Intermediate areas*	*Assisted areas*
Northern	69·2	12·9	82·1
North West	32·1	33·8	65·9
Yorkshire/Humberside	8·1	43·2	51·4
East Midlands	2·1	3·1	5·2
West Midlands	0	70·7	70·7
South West	3·6	9·4	13·1
South East	0	0	0
East Anglia	0	0	0

Note: Assisted areas may be either development areas or intermediate areas.

Rural Mail Services

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he intends to take to enable the Royal Mail to continue with its £200 million subsidy for rural mail services under his proposals to limit the postal monopoly.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 30 January 1992]:* The Government have repeatedly made it clear in the citizens charter White Paper and elsewhere that our overriding commitment remains the maintenance of a universal service, with an affordable, uniform tariff structure. We recognise the importance which individuals and businesses attach to this, especially in rural areas. However, the reduction in the letter monopoly to £1 in 1981 demonstrated that the benefits of greater competition and wider consumer choice can go hand in hand with a strong and successful Post Office.

DEFENCE

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what date construction of the A91 building at AWE Aldermaston commenced;

(2) what are the works being carried out in the rectification of the problems in the A91 building at AWE Aldermaston;

(3) when he expects the A91 building at AWE Aldermaston to become fully operational.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Construction of A91 commenced in January 1985. Following the discovery during commissioning of corrosion in pipework and vessels a full investigation into the causes of the problem was launched. As a result of this investigation further studies are necessary to assess a range of possible actions. Consequently, remedial work has not yet started and we are unable to estimate when the building will become fully operational.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects operational production rates to start at the A90 building at AWE Aldermaston.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Production in A90 is scheduled to commence in time to meet the needs of the Trident programme.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the A90 building at AWE Aldermaston can start operational production rates while the A91 building is not operational.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long he expects the A45 building at AWE Aldermaston to remain operational.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I expect the A45 building at AWE Aldermaston to remain operational for the foreseeable future.

Gareloch

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the mean tide level calculated for the Gareloch prior to construction of the shiplift facility CSB Faslane.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The mean tide level of the Gareloch prior to the construction of the shiplift facility at CSB Faslane was +0·28 m above ordnance datum (OD).

Royal Navy Armament Depot, Coulport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many design changes have been made to date to the explosives handling jetty to be installed at RNAD Coulport; and what assessment of the impact of recent design changes to the seaworthiness of the explosives handling jetty to be installed at RNAD Coulport have been made by his Department.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since tenders were invited in 1987, detailed design of the explosives handling jetty has continued against the original requirement. This has involved some 100 significant design alterations. All aspects of the facility, including draught, are kept under constant review by my Department and by Lloyd's register and it remains on course to meet the requirements of the Trident programme.

Vanguard Submarines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there is still a requirement for a dedicated degaussing facility for the Vanguard class submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The requirement for magnetic treatment of Vanguard and other classes of submarine remains.

Faslane and Coulport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the summary of the Bovis audit of construction at Faslane and Coulport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The main recommendations of the Bovis report were set out in the Government's response to the 1990-91 House of Commons Defence Committee report on the Trident programme (HC286) published on 6 November 1991. Commercial sensitivities preclude more extensive publication of the report.

Troop Withdrawals (Germany)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux regarding the impact of the programme of troop withdrawal from Germany on the work of the service; and what response he has made.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any such representations to Ministers by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. Service headquarters have however been approached by nearby citizens advice bureaux seeking advice on the possible effects of the reduction in the services on local communities.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, pursuant to his statement on 10 December 1991, *Official Report*, column 733, he will set out the future numbers and roles of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel to be employed *(a)* in the Rapier anti-aircraft missile force, *(b)* as support for mobile air defence radar convoys in the new United Kingdom air defence system and *(c)* in mission planning for Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The feasibility of employing Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel in the Rapier force and as support for mobile air defence radar convoys is still under consideration. Personnel of No. 3 maritime headquarters unit are providing mission support facilities for the Nimrod forward operating base at RAF St. Mawgan. It is not our practice to give precise numbers of personnel, regular or reserve, engaged on specific tasks.

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the wartime role, establishment and strength of each branch *(a)* the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and *(b)* the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The wartime roles of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force are maritime headquarters support, ground defence, short-range air defence, air movements and aeromedical evacuation.

The Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve provides specialist personnel in the fields of intelligence, photo interpretation and public relations. It is not the practice to give detailed figures of the establishment and strength of individual branches of the volunteer reserve forces. Total strengths are, however, given in table 4.6 of volume 2 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991" (Cm. 1559-II).

Radiological Emergencies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has held concerning the exclusion on grounds of national security of information or classes of sites from requirements to disclose public information on radiological emergencies.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministry of Defence officials were involved in discussions with the Health and Safety Executive prior to the publication, in November 1991, of its consultative document CD37 "Proposals for the Public Information for Radiation Emergencies Regulations".

Nuclear Material

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will meet the United States Departments of Defence and Energy to discuss the tranportation of nuclear explosive material and nuclear wastes to reduce their reuseability.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My officials hold regular discussions with United States authorities on nuclear matters including transportation.

Nuclear Weapons

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give full details of the reasons for the breakdown of the nuclear weapons transport on Sunday 1 December near St. Albans; how many vehicles are in use; and what assessment he has made of their fitness for the job.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 12 December 1991 at col. *544*.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice his Department has made available, or intends to make available, to service personnel serving in the Falkland Islands and their families, regarding the possible health effects of exposure to ultraviolet light.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None. There is no evidence of health problems amongst service men or their families from ultraviolet light in the Falkland islands.

Beef

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries from where beef was purchased for consumption by the armed services in 1991 and in each case, including the United Kingdom, give the quantity bought and amount spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Details of supplies by country of origin are not available. The predominant source of supply in 1991 however was South America. The quantity of beef purchased in 1991 was approximately 3,500 metric tonnes valued at approximately £8·5 million.

MOD Harrogate

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what cost comparisons have been made between RAF Wyton and MOD Harrogate in the last 12 months.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Investigations to establish the relative costs of various options for consolidating the administration of RAF logistic support, including use of RAF Wyton and MOD Harrogate, are under way but none have been completed in the last 12 months.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to close MOD Harrogate.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are no plans to close MOD Harrogate.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with civil service trade unions regarding the possible closure of MOD Harrogate.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: None. Whatever proposals for change may emerge, the unions will be consulted under normal departmental procedures before decisions are taken.

Defence Budget

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now make it his policy to release information on the long-term costings of the defence budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement on 2 May 1991 at column *292*.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent information on the running costs of individual units of the armed forces has been used in the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The "Options for Change" studies focused primarily on strategic priorities in response to the changing international security environment. Associated assessments of affordability did not require information on the running costs of individual units.

Army and RAF Units

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what differences exist between his policies regarding the release of information on the percentage increase in the capability of *(a)* Army units and *(b)* RAF units.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None, but quantitative assessments of changes in capability have been undertaken only in relation to selected Army formations.

New Management Strategy

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *88*, what are the different levels of budget holding within the new management strategy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Below the top level budgets, published in Cm 1559-1 at figure 11, there is a hierarchy of subordinate budgets following the chain of command. Within each top level budget, there may be up to three further levels: higher level budgets, intermediate higher level budgets and basic level budgets.

RAF Procurement

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to centralise the procurement of RAF equipment.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Equipment procurement for the armed forces has been centralised since the Procurement Executive of the Ministry of Defence was created following the Rayner report in 1971.

Menwith Hill Station

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what form of award was presented to the director of the Menwith Hill station for support to Desert Storm/Desert Shield; who presented the award; and what was the cost of arranging fighter planes to fly over Menwith Hill station on 16 January.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The director of Menwith Hill station is a United States official and any awards are a matter for the United States Government. No flypast of fighter aircraft took place at Menwith Hill station on 16 January.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the danger to personnel working on Menwith Hill station or to people in the vicinity from radio frequency radiation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no health risk to employees at Menwith Hill station or to people in the vicinity from radio frequency radiation.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Menwith Hill station presents any hazards to aircraft; and whether there are any restrictions on aircraft flying in the vicinity of Menwith Hill station.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Woolwich Arsenal

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *608*, on nuclear research at the royal arsenal, Woolwich, what was the nature of the early research; what was the origin of the contamination currently being restored at the Woolwich garrison; and whether any nuclear research or storage of radioactive materials currently takes place at either site.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During the early 1950s some classified research work was carried out at the royal arsenal, Woolwich. The soil contamination at the Woolwich garrison arises from former luminising operations carried out as part of the maintenance of military equipment. No nuclear research is currently being carried out at either site. Apart from the temporary storage, at the garrison, of waste arising from the removal of the contaminated soil, no radioactive materials are stored at either site.

Goose Bay

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contributions of finance, advice and information have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the Canadian Government towards *(a)* preparation and production of the environmental impact statement on military flying at Goose bay and *(b)* development and implementation of measures to mitigate the adverse effects of low-level flying from Goose bay.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: At the request of the Canadian Government the Ministry of Defence provided a forecast of future levels of RAF activity at Goose bay. No financial contribution has been made to the costs of preparing the environmental impact statement.

The Canadian Department of National Defence has consulted the Ministry of Defence and the Officer Commanding RAF unit Goose bay on the development and implementation of a number of environmental monitoring and mitigation measures. To date the United Kingdom has contributed £118,000 towards the total costs of these measures which are shared equally by the four signatories to the Goose bay multi-national memorandum of understanding.

Exercise Luce Belle

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any of the Royal Air Force aircraft participating in Exercise Luce Belle in June 1990 experienced malfunctions of radar altimeter or low-height warning equipment during their noise measurement runs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department has no record of any of the Royal Air Force aircraft participating in Exercise Luce Belle in June 1990 experienced malfunction of radar altimeter or low-height warning equipment during their noise measurement runs.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the crews of aircraft participating in noise measurement runs during Exercise Luce Belle in June 1990 were at any time instructed or authorised to fly at less than 100 ft above ground level.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: One of the target heights for the aircraft participating in noise measurement runs during Exercise Luce Belle was 100 ft above ground level.

RAF Equipment

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to centralise the storage of RAF equipment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no immediate plans to change the storage arrangements for RAF equipment.

Low Flying

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given by his Department to the commissioning of epidemiological research into the impact of noise from low-flying aircraft on human hearing in populations resident in tactical training areas.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department, in collaboration with authorities in the United States and Canada, is examining the feasibility of a study to investigate the possible effects on health, including hearing, of noise from low-flying aircraft.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all overseas deployments of Royal Air Force aircraft in 1991 for the purpose of low-level flying training, giving the locations, dates and types of aircraft in each case.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Central records are not held in a form which would enable the information requested to be provided.

RAF Cost Comparisons

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what cost comparisons have been made between RAF Carlisle and RAF Stafford in the last 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Wilton Park Executive Agency

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of the Wilton Park executive agency, including performance-related element; and what is the length of time of the chief executive's contract.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The chief executive's salary is on the home civil service grade 5 national scale, the maximum of

which is £39,402 (extendable to £46,122 by performance pay). The chief executive was appointed director of Wilton Park in 1983. His contract, as extended, expires on 9 October 1992.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will state the cash amount per person awarded under the group bonus scheme for the Wilton Park executive agency in the last year for which figures are available, and the conditions attached to its award;

(2) if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related elements, in each case where appointments have been made to the Wilton Park executive agency at grade 7 or above, since its establishment;

(3) when the last annual report of the Wilton Park executive agency was published; and when the next one is due;

(4) how many staff were in post on the date that the Wilton Park executive agency was established; and how many are in post now;

(5) if he will list those new facilities for staff, including nurseries and health care schemes, which have been introduced in the Wilton Park executive agency since its establishment;

(6) how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of the Wilton Park executive agency; and whether the cost was borne by the parent Department or the new agency;

(7) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into the Wilton Park executive agency since its establishment and provide a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: These are matters for the chief executive of Wilton Park executive agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Wilton Park executive agency.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is a personal matter for the chief executive. I have asked him to consider this question and to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by the Wilton Park executive agency since its establishment and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The key targets for Wilton Park executive agency were set out in *Hansard*, column *525*, of 25 October 1991. Further, quality of service, targets for the 1991-92 to 1993-94 period have been set as follows:

(a) To increase the proportion of conference participants from outside Europe; to increase the proportion from Southern, Central and South-Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union; to increase the proportion of business men, trade unionists and members of non-governmental organisations.

(b) To increase the relevance, focus and originality of conferences in order to enhance their reputation and increase positive responses from participants.

(c) To reduce the publication time for conference reports to three months and to increase the number of books and articles published.

(d) To increase the participation of Wilton Park staff in the activities of other institutions.

No such formal targets were set before the agency was established.

Cyprus

Ms. Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he intends to take to implement the UN resolutions on Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: We remain committed to the search for a solution to the Cyprus dispute, and continue to work actively in support of the UN Secretary-General's efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement. Implementation of relevant UN resolutions will be an integral element of that settlement.

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to ensure that Gibraltar is included within the European Community's external frontier; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Maastricht European Council tasked the EC presidency to find a way forward on this issue through discussions with the United Kingdom and Spain. Discussions continue. We continue to argue for Gibraltar's inclusion in the convention.

Council of Ministers

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of *(a)* the occasions in 1991 on which the European Council of Ministers has met to consider scientific and research matters, showing who has represented the United Kingdom at such meetings and *(b)* what meetings to discuss such matters are proposed for 1992.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Research Council met on 24 April and 28 October 1991. Lord Hesketh and Lord Reay respectively represented Her Majesty's Government. Research Councils are planned for 29 April, 12 October and 9 or 10 December 1992.

Amolak Singh

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange for the British high commission in Delhi to request a statement from the Indian authorities on the treatment of Amolak Singh, a British citizen, of Pudsey in west Yorkshire, at Delhi airport; if he will take steps to ensure arrangements are made for Mr. Singh to receive an apology and the money refunded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office received details of Mr. Amolak Singh's complaint on 22 January 1992. The British high commission in New Delhi has been asked to make inquiries of the relevant Indian authorities.

CSCE

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy at the meeting of foreign ministers at the conference on security and co-operation in Europe in Prague on 30 and 31 January *(a)* to pledge an increase in United Kingdom donations to support the organisation and operations of the CSCE and *(b)* to encourage all states represented to publish a register of all Government-sanctioned sales of arms and military equipment.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The costs of the CSCE institutions and other CSCE activities are shared among the participating states on the basis of an agreed formula. The United Kingdom is one of the six states making the largest contributions. Decisions on future work in the CSCE (and therefore the eventual size of the United Kingdom contribution) will be taken at the Helsinki follow-up meeting (March to July 1992).

The United Kingdom and its partners in the European Community have proposed that the Council of Ministers adopt, at its meeting in Prague, a statement committing itself to participate in the United Nations' register of conventional arms transfers.

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 1991–92

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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Scotland 948-50
Wales 74w

Ysbyty Gwynedd
215w

Zaman, Akhtar
Entry clearances 323w

Zambia
Political prisoners 676w
Political refugees 673w